

PREMIUM CONTENT

login | logout >> subscribe my account | email | search | sitemap

ireland.com
THE IRISH TIMES



Tuesday,
May 17, 2005

TODAY CLASSIFIEDS SERVICES

THE IRISH TIMES

Take me to...

GO

THE IRISH TIMES BREAKING NEWS NEWS IN FOCUS SPORT BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY WEATHER

Breaking News



THE IRISH TIMES

In the Newspaper
Daily

- Front Page
- Ireland
- World
- Finance**
- Features
- Sport
- Opinion
- Letters
- Crossword
- Article Index

Weekly Index

- MONDAY
- Health
- TUESDAY
- Education and Living
- WEDNESDAY
- Motors
- An Teanga Bheo
- THURSDAY
- Science Today
- SATURDAY
- Weekend
- News Features
- Obituaries

Search

Search the newspaper archive...

Finance

Fri, Oct 12, 01

Latest 'must have' gadget does not fit the bill

Pocket PCs still can't pick up e-mail easily and are another case of the tech industry expecting its customers to get a degree in computer science to operate a gadget

By NIALL MCKAY

Last week, Microsoft kicked off the latest round of the battle for dominance of the handheld computer market with the introduction of its new Pocket PC 2002 operating system.

The software, which will appear on pocket computers from Toshiba, Casio, Compaq, Acer, NEC and others, will soon be rivalled by new offerings due to be introduced by Handspring this month and Nokia next month.

Certainly, the Pocket PC is the latest "must have" in the consumer electronics sector.

In the past, one might have been tempted to laugh at the geeks who whip out a gadget and spend the next 10 minutes asking you to repeat your phone number, but these days they can double as walkmans, diaries, photo albums, electronic books, portable e-mail clients and basically provide a view of any file held on your desktop computer.

At a press conference in San Francisco, Microsoft chief executive Mr Steve Ballmer proudly announced the product, saying that the company had finally got it right.

"We didn't quite have it all together last time," he said, referring to the previous version of the Pocket PC. "The plumbing was right but the user experience was way, way off."

However, despite the fact that it has added umpteen different functions, in the US Pocket PCs still don't carry out the essential task of picking up e-mail quickly and easily.

Instead, one is forced to add a wireless modem or, worse, add a modem and plug it into the telephone line, or connect to a mobile phone, or simply wait until you can connect it to your computer and download your e-mail.

In short, it's another stunning case of the technology industry expecting its customers to get a degree in computer science to operate a gadget.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if Mr Ballmer were to give the same speech for the introduction of the Pocket PC 2003, by which time, I hope, the company and its partners will have a device that provides easy connectivity.

"With this new product, Microsoft has targeted Palm," said Mr Seamus McAteer, director of technology consulting firm Jupiter. "Instead they should have targeted the Blackberry (a type-enhanced pager that provides e-mail connectivity)."

Then there's the price - a hefty \$500 (€545), way too much dosh to capture a healthy slice of the consumer electronics market. This may have worked last year when there were few limits on corporate expense accounts but in these days of tighter fiscal policies it's going to be a spectacular flop. Why?

Well because pocket computers and mobile phones were the ideal crossover item.

People could put their hand on their heart and swear that they were absolutely essential for their business but then they could take them home and play with them. Those days are gone and companies are not going to shell out \$500 for equipment that that is not essential to the business.

Furthermore, the various companies that make up the Pocket PC consortium are not quite sure what standards to support. "Two years ago everybody announced that they would support Bluetooth," said a spokesman for AudioVox.

"But the standard has not really taken off and now many of the vendors are talking about supporting 802.11. We've had a hard time deciding which way to go so we've decided to just provide connectivity to a cellphone."

Bluetooth, a standard that was to replace the need for

wires, would have enabled users to easily use the device with a mobile phone or indeed to play music held on their pocket PC on an Bluetooth-enabled stereo system.

On the other hand, 802.11 enables people to access the internet at high speed, provided there is a special piece of hardware in the immediate vicinity.

Some vendors such as Compaq support Bluetooth; others require the user to buy a 802.11 networking card and plug it in.

Either way we are stuck with the old problems of a variety of different standards, most of which will take some tinkering with to get working.

As addicted to gadgets as I am, I know that I will not be buying one of these devices for some time. My advice is to wait. Perhaps they will get it right next time.

Niall McKay is a freelance writer living in Silicon Valley, California, and can be reached at www.niall.org.

© The Irish Times

 print  e-mail a friend  e-mail the author [back to top](#) 

© 2005 ireland.com

[About Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#)