



MARK NEEDHAM

Well-informed pocket

Mark Needham finds that even after ten years there are still improvements to be made to the PDA diary function

Reading Sir Walter Scott is best done at leisure. On a lazy weekend, with the family away, and when there isn't much to do about the house, the lengthy descriptive passages of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* or *Ivanhoe* seem like charming period detail. With the benefit of leisure, the structure of the plot can be admired, and its improbability forgotten. But speed-reading the same story during a few spare minutes on a work-day doesn't have the same effect – if I try to read one of his books on a train or in an airport it all seems like pointless hokum.

POCKET INFORMANT

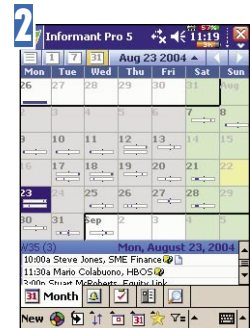
It's now more than ten years since the first Palm Pilot was released, and so you might be forgiven for thinking that everything that could be done to improve the layout of an electronic diary had been tried out several times over. Yet the urge to improve what's in front of us is so strong that new software writers are still trying. A few issues back I reviewed *Agendus* (see issue 118, p198), an improved interface for Palm OS Organisers, and for the past few weeks I've been using *Pocket Informant*, a similar package for Pocket PC for which a free trial version can be downloaded at www.pocketinformant.com.

To my mind, the best features of both *Agendus* and *Pocket Informant* are their improved Week and Month screens in the *Agenda* application. Screenshot 1 shows the normal Pocket PC Month view, while screenshot 2 shows the same data, in the *Pocket Informant* Month view. Not only does it look prettier, but each colour or bar means something different. For example, the blue bar on Monday 26th July is a birthday. A green bar across a day would mean an all-day event, while the white bars show appointments booked. A higher line means appointments in the morning (for example, 7th August) and a lower line means appointments in the afternoon (for example, 8th August).

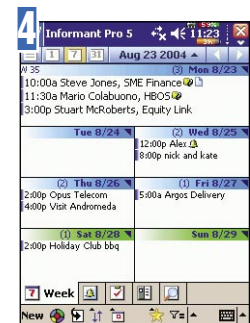
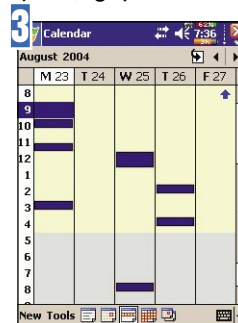
Screenshots 3 and 4 compare the same data for a week, while Screenshots 5 and 6 compare the task lists. Not only does the *Pocket Informant* screen display more information, but it also has a huge list of custom options – for example, in its Week view you can see that I have turned on the option to display ISO week numbers.

ELOGBOOK

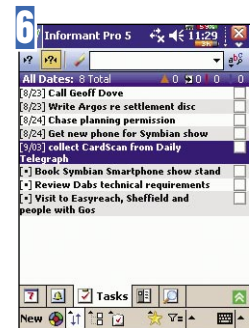
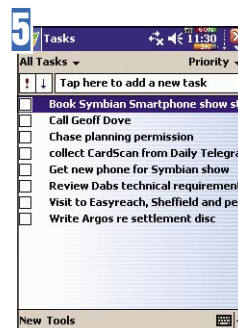
The use of computer databases to identify good and bad trends in the performance of medical procedures has a long history, and has been promoted by some important medical and nursing practitioners, so it's no surprise that handheld computers are now used in hospitals. *Elogbook* is a



Compared to the normal Pocket PC Month view, *Pocket Informant's* (above, right) shows far more information.



The same is true for their respective Week views...



... and their Task lists.

software product from Australia that allows surgeons to capture data about operations they've performed, and just as you might add photos to your Address list if you have a camera phone, doctors can now add pictures to their databases too. Not only can *eLogbook* record and find all the operations performed by a doctor, but it can store pictures of those operations too.

I spoke to Dr Olivia Morris from Australia, who uses the product:



'Doctors are an unusually mobile workforce' she said. 'If I go to a different surgery or a different hospital, I always have my Pocket PC with me.' As well as being a convenient way to carry data, the program also acts as an audit for the surgeon – it's now a requirement of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons that all trainees keep a log-book of operations they have performed, recording any complications or adverse events. There are advantages to keeping a log-book for qualified surgeons as well said Dr Morris: 'If you were challenged legally, you could produce statistics showing your rate of adverse events was average or below average. You could show how many of these procedures you had done, so that it was clear that this was not the first one you had done, and how many were under direct supervision of another surgeon.'

Naturally, a doctor's idea of what might be a nice picture to take using a camera phone or camera on a Pocket PC might differ from that of the rest of the population: 'Doctors undergo lifelong learning,' explained Dr Morris, 'so if you have a particular case and you take a photo of it, it's there to look back on if you experience the same symptoms again. You might also take a series of photos – of the different stages of the wound healing, or in plastics where it isn't uncommon to do a series of operations.'

Series 60 Smartphones have always felt the same to me: ideally you need the leisure of youth to appreciate them. Then you can download all your favourite songs to the memory card, take photos of all your friends and fix the Contacts menu so their pictures pop up whenever they call. But when I took a Nokia 6600 straight out of its box, stuck a SIM into it and headed for a conference, my first thought was: 'Get those pictures out of the way, I want to make a phone call...'

For years the market for smartphones has been 'about to take off'. The huge rise in Psion's share price five years ago resulted from the market, even back then, looking forward to the day when Symbian phones would start selling in their millions. With the Nokia 6600, now free on contract, that day is almost upon us. According to market researcher Canals, shipments of smartphones have leaped since the beginning of 2004. The majority of those shipped have indeed had Symbian operating systems, but the Microsoft-based SPV smartphones and the Palm-based Treo 600 appear to be doing well too.

'To date, Nokia has been dominant within the smartphone market,' said analyst Rachel Lashford. 'However, we expect the Orange SPV to make a leap forward in Q3 based on its sales of the c500.' But according to my unscientific survey of Nokia 6600 users I happen to meet, the fact that you can add extra software, a keyboard or a GPS system to a smartphone generally comes as a bit of a surprise to them. For many of them it's just a cheap and reasonably flash camera phone that has the advantage of being permitted on the corporate account. Some people pick up on one feature that's important to them. For example, Thomas Power, chairman of Ecademy (www.ecademy.com), is interested in the communication capabilities of the phone and refers to

his Nokia 6600 as a 'spam phone', because it lets him send a text message to 50 recipients at once.

After three weeks of using this model myself, I've added the Stowaway Bluetooth keyboard to enable typing texts on a proper keyboard (£99.99 inc VAT from www.pdahut.com), and a GPS package to my phone. To get the keyboard working you need to download a keyboard driver for the 6600 from www.thinkoutside.com, and of course you'll need to have

some connection between your PC and your phone to transfer it across. Rather to my surprise I plugged in a USB Bluetooth dongle and enabled the My Bluetooth Places icon on my PC, and it found the phone first time round and transferred the keyboard driver across without any problem.

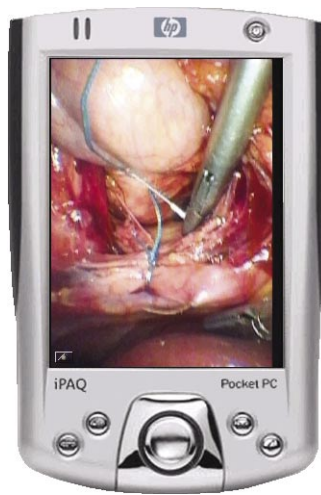
UK maps for a GPS package are too large to install via Bluetooth, so they come on MMC media that fits inside the phone. There are currently four GPS packages for the Nokia 6600 and other Symbian Series 60 phones – Route 66 Mobile Britain, TomTom Mobile, CoPilot Live and Wayfinder Mobile Navigator. All are on sale at prices between £175 and £225 at websites, such as www.globalpositioningsystems.co.uk. I've been using Route 66, which employs the Navtech route database rather than the TeleAtlas one that feeds TomTom, Navman and Wayfinder.

I've been impressed by both completeness of the data, and the speed at which it's retrieved from the MMC media. For example, if I search for 'Basing Hilt' it comes back instantly with 'Basingstoke National Hilton' without needing to search first by town and then by street. Its Points of Interest database also allows me to search for the nearest station, which is, not surprisingly, Basingstoke station, and decide whether it's close enough to walk to. By foot the route is 1.21 miles, which it thinks will take me 29 minutes to walk, whereas if I decide to be a wimp and get a taxi, the route will be 1.7 miles, which it thinks will take 4 minutes. Within London, the 'Find nearest station or tube station' function is also very useful. For example, I recently went to a building for which Route 66 said the nearest tube station was Chancery Lane, but as I was pulling into Central London on the Piccadilly line it let me check how far the building was from Holborn station, and as a result I got out there and walked

rather than having to change at Holborn onto the Central Line just to go one stop from Holborn to Chancery Lane.

I've also tried walking along the street with a Bluetooth GPS receiver in one hand and the phone in the other, trying to follow their directions on foot. This didn't work quite so well, as not only is there a distinct possibility of bumping into a lamppost while peering at a tiny screen, but also on foot you don't move fast enough for the software to estimate your direction of motion accurately. ■

Not only can eLogbook record operations performed by a doctor, it can store pictures of it too



A doctor's idea of a nice family snapshot.

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