

COMPUTER

NEWS AND NOTES

A Wise Purchase Now Can Save Money Later

(NAPSA)—By now, you've heard that Uncle Sam is cutting U.S. workers a tax rebate check. The money should be in the mail at the latest by September, and many folks already have received their refunds. Those who haven't are probably camping out next to their mailboxes right now. The question of how to spend the unexpected cash has been the source of much conversation from political pundits and market analysts to retailers and friends.

But before you take a trip, tackle that next home-improvement project or salivate over a flat-screen TV, perhaps you should ponder the purchase of something more useful, something that could help the average busy person save time and money in the long run: a personal digital assistant (PDA).

Personal digital assistants are replacing their paper counterparts at a surprising rate. Aberdeen Group analysts estimate there were 8.9 million PDAs sold in 2000, and they expect handheld sales to grow by 30 percent a year through 2005, bringing the total number of people carrying PDAs to 39 million.

There are lots of PDAs out there to choose from, one of which is the Pocket PC. Microsoft Corp. and hardware makers such as Casio Computer Company Ltd., Compaq Computer Corp. and Hewlett-Packard Co. have literally put the power of a PC in your hand. Pocket PCs let you take your most important information with you, saving time, money and headaches. Just ask Jeff McKean, an Office Depot Inc. store manager and self-described "technogadget lover." He says he's owned a number of handheld gizmos and is presently the proud owner of a Compaq iPAQ. While he says the mobile device definitely cost him a few pennies initially, it continues to help him sock away a few here and there as well.

"It's more than made up for its initial cost. I cannot live without it," said McKean, only half-jokingly. McKean says his Pocket PC has enabled him to better serve



his customers by allowing him to place information he needs, such as product availability, pricing and competitors' Web sites, literally at his fingertips.

"There's sometimes a little bit of prep time involved in making it useful," he said. Those efforts include loading spreadsheets or other documents onto the Pocket PC. "But once it's done, those few minutes save me hours, and ultimately time is money."

On a personal note, McKean says games he has stored on his iPAQ have kept his kids content on car trips and enabled him to enjoy his CDs in MP3 form while traveling, too.

"One of the great things about the Pocket PC is that it lets you combine your personal and work information on one small device, including things such as music, electronic books and games, in addition to your calendar and contacts," said Mary Starman, product manager for the Mobile Devices Division at Microsoft. "For me, it is like buying a high-quality handbag or coat, one that is timeless and that you use every day. Each time you use it, the return on your investment goes up. The same thing applies with a Pocket PC: The more you use it and take advantage of the sheer variety of things you use it for, the more you realize the device is a great investment."

More information on the Pocket PC is available at <http://www.microsoft.com/mobile/pocketpc/default.asp>.