

Talking Technology

Become comfortable embracing the wireless world

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

Perhaps I am a technology geek after all—I enjoy learning about new technologies, especially as they stretch me way beyond my comfort zone.



The wireless technology world is rapidly changing.

With the increased ability for wireless devices to integrate e-mail data, voice technology, built-in cameras and colour displays, the wireless world is experiencing unprecedented growth.

Wireless technology devices can include your cell phone, laptop, personal data assistant (PDA) such as a Compaq iPaq, a Handspring Treo, a Palm Tungsten W, a Toshiba e750, a Dell Axim X5, a Blackberry 6710 and now even your watch!

With Dell expanding its market reach last year by entering the PDA market and with a commitment to bring high quality devices our way, things are going to get very interesting in the wireless market in Canada.

I am the first to admit that I do not like to be forced into technology decisions.

It bothers me when TV makers try to force you to buy a Wide Screen TV by having your friendly neighbourhood Blockbuster carry mostly Wide Screen DVDs.

In the wireless world, I don't really feel that I am being forced into anything.

Rather, I am looking for the benefits that come with being wireless— accessible anytime, when I want and where I want.

The wireless industry is quite interesting with the largest growth by far being driven by cellular phone upgrades.

Did you know that research shows that Canadians on average upgrade their cell phones every 24 months, which in turns drives an over 20 per cent growth per year in the Canadian cell phone marketplace? Absolutely astounding growth!

I have always been an early adopter of technology, which simply means that I spend more than I should on these devices.

When we lived in Ottawa, before Compaq or Palm ever entered the PDA market, I purchased a Psion PDA, which was the world's first functional handheld computer.

It had an awesome keyboard that you could actually type on, a proprietary operating system with a proprietary word processor and spreadsheet but it really didn't integrate with anything.

I was definitely spoiled as this device was outstanding but definitely not wireless.

The only other downside was trying to find local technical support.

I have had older versions of Palm, Visor and Compaq PDA's along with almost every phone that exists but until recently I hadn't had the experience of an all in one device.

Last year I decided to take the plunge and purchase a Blackberry 6710, which has everything integrated into one wireless unit – phone, wireless e-mail, wireless web-access, calendar, address book, notes, etc. that integrates relatively seamlessly with my laptop.

Although I had some technical difficulties initially, I really do enjoy the connectivity of these devices.

They give me the opportunity to respond more quickly when I am out of the office.

I know I could simply purchase the wireless e-mail device for my laptop but I have resisted this as I really like the Blackberry.

The only downside has been the phone reception, which I have found to be lacking at times.

They have just released the new Blackberry 6210, which promises even better phone reception. They certainly have me hooked on the Blackberry.

The interesting part of the wireless world is what they are going to make wireless next.

From a wireless watch to wireless smart appliances in your home, who knows what they will think of next.

For instance, Microsoft predicts that worldwide home networking revenues in North America will reach \$5 billion US by 2007.

Canadians apparently are ripe for this technology as over 70 per cent of Canadians have household PCs and over 90 per cent of us are connected to the Internet.

Interesting that MicroSoft Canada estimates that the biggest share of this market will be with wireless gaming consoles, wireless personal video recorders and wireless DVD players.

Then there are so called "Hotspots", which are public access points that use a Wi-Fi network to deliver wireless Internet access in public places.

IDC Canada expects there to be 450 such Hotspots to be operational across Canada by the end of the year.

Wireless does have a practical side.

Providers tell me that with many children now having cell phones, parents are taking advantage of the potential increase in safety provided to their children when they have a wireless device.

If they are ever in danger and are not able to call you directly, they can potentially send you a wireless e-mail without being noticed.

Let's hope that our children never need to use the device for safety reasons!

My most favourite wireless technology geek device is a new line of watches by Fossil, which is a PDA on your wrist.

They initially launched this new technology using Microsoft's Smart Personal Objects Technology (called the Wrist Net) and it literally includes everything – weather, sports updates, messaging, etc.

Fossil has also just released a new watch entitled the Wrist PDA, which uses Palm's operating system.

This product was awarded the best product at Comdex 2002.

So you want to become a wireless technology geek?

Well, for a mere \$300 US plus shipping and taxes you can have the new wireless Write PDA watch by Fossil.

Forget it kids– at this price, not even Dad would be crazy enough to put this one on his Christmas wish list!

However, since we are talking strategy, if you really want a watch for yourself that Dad will be wearing all the time – put this on the Christmas wish for Gramma and Grampa – calm down Mom and Dad I am just kidding!

Shipment via FedEx would be fine!

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