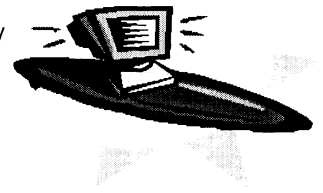


CYBERLEX

By Jason Schoolmeester, NT Treasury



Clients to see. People to call. Tasks to do. Court to attend. Notes to write. Cases to read. Sound familiar? Being a lawyer often involves juggling an ever increasing matter load and the thousand and one things you have to do yesterday.

How do you keep track of all this information? How do you have the information you need when you need it? For some it is by using daily planners, address books and a writing pad. Others rely on making notes scribbled on scrap paper. Then there is just relying on memory alone. Is there another, dare I say, better way using technology?

Before answering (and you know it will be yes), let me raise your expectations. How would you like a computing device that lets you store and manage your: diary/calendar; to-do items; address/contact details; and notes, made in and out of the office? That's not a bad start, but maybe you would like to be able to: read and send email; read cases and legislation; make case notes and outlines of argument; and review the latest headlines. All this, and you want complete synchronisation with your desktop/laptop and corporate systems. Now the real catch, you want all of this functionality with maximum portability? In fact let's say you want the computing device to fit in the palm of your hand.

With all the above in mind, the answer is a resounding YES. The range of handheld devices running the Palm operating system provides all the functionality described above and more and all in a size that fits the palm of your hand (and in some cases, even your shirt pocket). There are a number of vendors, but I use the Palm Vx from Palm Inc (the original vendor). The Palm has become my companion wherever I go. It gives me access to my critical information (and some not so critical) away from my desk. The Palm is a pen-based device using Graffiti, a modified alphabet that is easy to learn (I am currently writing at about 30 words a minute). For those worried about Graffiti, you can use the pop-up on-screen keyboard or even purchase an

attachable keyboard. I am not going to dazzle you with the specifications for each Palm, you can visit www.palm.com (the official site) and view the range of Palm devices on offer. There is a Palm for all users and budgets. There is also plenty of information about how to select the right Palm for you. I want to focus more on why and how a portable personal digital assistant such as the Palm can benefit you, as a lawyer. First, the Palm and indeed any organiser is not a total solution. The Palm does not replace your PC and it does not attempt to. The Palm is not a laptop. The Palm gives you access to critical information with some additional kick. If you see your handheld as an extension to your desktop PC then you are in the right mind-set. The Palm's greatest power is size and functionality. The Palm can go places you would not think to take your laptop. Whether you slip your Palm into your shirt pocket or into your handbag, the point is that it is with you when you need it.

As I have stated, the Palm allows you to synchronise your schedule, contact information, to dos, notes and email. This of itself is enough to satisfy most users for the first few weeks. Gone are the days of trying to make sure that appointments made in corporate diaries and personal diaries are the same. With the Palm, you use both corporate systems and the Palm and simply synchronise them with the press of one button. Any conflicts are detected and noted in both systems. You can review and write email away from the office. In simple terms, you are not bound to your desk. In fact, with an appropriately configured system, you can even synchronise your Palm using your mobile phone. You and your firm will be kept up-to-date without you even stepping foot in the office.

The amazing thing about the Palm is that it works. Millions of users give testimony to this fact by owning one (or my case three!). This large user base has led to the development of many third party applications. Needless to say, many of these are useful for lawyers. By far the best types of applications for lawyers are outliners and document readers. Outliners enable lawyers to

make hierarchical lists suited to the creation of case notes and legal argument. Document readers convert the Palm into an electronic book with varying sophistication. This enables lawyers to carry: cases; legislation; pleadings; articles; and virtually any other document they want to carry. All documents are searchable either by the inbuilt search or the application's own search.

The website www.pallmlaw.com is dedicated to the use of Palm's for lawyers. A concept found on the site is the 'Legal Doc PalmPack'. Being primarily US based, it is of little use to NT practitioners, however, the concept is still valid. The contents of an NT Legal Doc PalmPack would depend on the individual lawyers area(s) of practice, so lets choose litigation. The NT Litigation Legal Doc PalmPack might be:

- The NT Self Government Act
- Supreme Court Rules & Act
- Local Court Rules & Act
- any other Act particular to current cases
- copies of pleadings
- witness statements

As you can see, essentially any document can be downloaded to the Palm. Another advantage of the Palm is the third party hardware that is being created. For example, there is an attachable voice recorder making the Palm a dictaphone.

The Palm and other handheld devices are a tool that can be used by lawyers to increase productivity, paying for themselves over and over again. The power of the Palm is that it can be used by anybody and in a variety of ways that suit the individual - the only limitation is your own creativity. In a competitive world, a Palm might be just one factor that gives you the edge over the competition.

The next edition of Balance will provide details about other providers of handheld devices for our readers.