

## Palm: The more practical PDA

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In my previous article, I explained why Palm PDAs were the way to go. Now, go buy a Palm-based PDA. Why? Because Palm is about to release a new round of models, and stores have lowered prices on the current models. Undoubtedly, upcoming models will have new features, but the current ones do everything you need for residency, and more.

The two main producers of Palm Operating System PDAs are Palm and Sony. Both support the same handwriting alphabet (Graffiti), and programs run equally well on each system. For displays, I prefer Sony. This is one item, however, where it is absolutely critical you judge for yourself, so go to a store and look at the units. Try the unit with the backlight on and off, in normal room light, and in a darkened area of the store (if possible). Also realize if the unit only looks good with the backlight on, this might be a problem, since it will be a significant battery drain.

Sony has a slightly different button style. While more cumbersome, they do not get accidentally pressed as often, especially when in your pocket. Since any button pressed turns the unit on, this means Sony's might last longer on a single charge.

Sony tends to give you more for your money, for instance, all units come with carrying cases, and even their cheaper units have cameras. A notable exception is that they provide HotSync cables instead of cradles. You can always buy a cradle separately, though, if that's really important to you.

Finally Sony, as well as their carrying cases, tend to be narrower, thus fitting better into a scrub pocket.

The next consideration is bundled software. All units come with synchronization software to move information between PDA and PC. Some units come with video and audio software. Some have software that displays Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and PDF files, either allowing you to only display files or display/edit them. Mac and Linux users beware; some software provide full functionality only if HotSync-ed with a Windows machine. If not included, there are third-party utilities to do all of the above, possibly available as freeware.

Can you learn Graffiti, or do you need a keyboard? If you must type, you have two choices: buy an external keyboard for your unit (about \$70), or go with a model that comes with a keyboard (Palm Tungsten C or W, or Sony's Clié PEGUX50/UKIT1). However, these units with keyboards are expensive, so be forewarned. Plus, everyone I know has been able to learn to use Graffiti.

Next, do you need a color display? The only current model that does not have color is the Palm Zire 21. At a \$100, it has 8MB of RAM and is the shortest, narrowest, and lightest (though not the thinnest) of Palm's models. The processor is slower, but rarely is speed a concern. The only real drawback is the screen; 160x160 pixels is less than all other models at 320x320.

If you can afford another \$100, consider Palm's thinnest model, the Tungsten E, or the Sony Clié PEG-TJ27. Each comes with a color display, 32MB of RAM, and an expansion slot (Palm's expansion accepts peripherals, such as an MP3 player, but Sony's is only for memory). The Clié comes with a free case, higher resolution screen, and built-in digital camera. For another \$100, the Sony Clié TJ37 (\$300) provides built-in wireless ethernet and MP3 and video players (including a built-in speaker and headphone jack but no headphones).

Sure, Palm has a \$300 model as well, the Tungsten T2, but it includes features residents rarely need (built-in voice recording, Bluetooth wireless connectivity). The only useful feature the T2 has is a collapsible design for a better scrub pocket fit.

Above \$300, you can really play around. Your choices are endless, but at this price, it is more than what I am willing to lose in a busy ED.

So, what do I recommend? If you are strapped, I stand by my previous recommendation, a used Palm IIIxe (about \$30 on eBay). It will run everything needed for residency with acceptable performance. If you want a new, affordable unit with a warranty, buy a Palm Zire 21 for \$100. Finally, if you can spend a little more, I recommend the Sony Clié PEG-TJ27 (\$200). And if you absolutely must listen to tunes while you study, or are looking to buy an MP3 player anyway, go with a built-in MP3 player in the Sony Clié PEG-TJ37 (\$300). ■

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