

Buying the PDA

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So, you've decided to buy a PDA. Should you get a Palm-based one, a Pocket Windows (PW)-based one, or one from a random third party? If all you want is to store a little information (calendar, contacts), a third-party device might suffice. But if you want to use it in your residency, you will need the Palm- or PW-based device.

The name "Palm" represents two distinct products—the Palm Operating System (POS) and Palm Pilots (hardware). Palm Pilots run POS, but so do other handheld computers like the Sony Clié. That means any "Palm" software will run as seamlessly on a Clié as on a Palm Pilot (there are other manufacturers of Palm devices). Palm Pilots have even been incorporated into cell phones.

PW, on the other hand, is software from those darlings in Redmond, WA. Microsoft produces PW and licenses it to hardware manufacturers like HP (yup, the printer-people) and Toshiba to produce the devices and install Pocket Windows. Like Palm devices, there are cell phones that run PW. In contrast, software that is PW-compatible does not necessarily run on any PW device (due to different generations of PW).

So how do you make your decision? Excluding sales and rebates, a new, low-end Palm Pilot is about \$150. In general, the main differences between a low- and high-end Palm Pilot are integrated peripherals (phone, mp3 player, wireless connectivity). That means a low-end Palm Pilot will run programs as well as a high-

software. Plus, for Macintosh and Unix users, Palm is their only option.

But there are good things to say about PW. First, they come with Pocket Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Although there are POS programs that display these files, PW-devices obviate third-party translation. Plus, if you use Microsoft Outlook, Outlook synchronizes with Pocket Outlook on PW better than it does with Palm. To be fair, there are software programs that will improve synchronization between Palm and Outlook, but the total cost approaches buying a PW device. If I could afford a PW device, I would buy one just for the improved synchronization.

Finally, despite fewer programs for PW, the more important software programs, such as a pharmacopeia, do exist. EMRA will produce a PW version of the ABx Guide this Spring. And as the developer tools mature, it will become easier for programmers to simultaneously write for both Palm and PW. That means that PW will quickly close the gap in number of programs available.

So which do I recommend? A POS device: they're cheaper, more people have them, and there's more out there for them. ■

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end one.

A new, low-end PW device costs about twice as much. Why? Because PW requires more memory and a faster processor, and all PW devices I have seen are color, a feature you might not need. Palm devices let you save some money if you do not need color (dropping the price below \$150).

Because Palm has been around longer and is cheaper, there are 4-5 times as many Palm-users, along with much more

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2004 EMRA ABX FOR PALM OS AND POCKET PC COMING SOON!

The re-designed software includes many improvements suggested by you!

Thanks for helping to make this software better than ever.