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Microsoft hopes to be third time lucky

By Jim Jamieson
Staff Reporter

Microsoft Corp. and its corporate partners will up the ante in the personal-digital-assistant market today with the introduction of Microsoft's Pocket PC.

The device is the industry giant's third try at the handheld-computer market, and it is doing so with some help from Vancouver-based software company Intrinsic.

"People joke that it takes Microsoft until Version 3 to get something right," said Ben Waldman, Microsoft's vice-president in charge of mobile services. "Well, this is Version 3, and we got it right."

Additional plug-in hardware will allow the various models — built by Compaq Computer, Hewlett-Packard and Casio Computer — to connect to the Internet wirelessly, and provide them with more memory.

Besides containing all the usual



The iPaq Pocket PC from Compaq.

organizer functions, such as a calendar, to-do list and phone book, the Pocket PC allows users to send e-mail, play digital music, access the Internet, play a game, record a voice memo

or download an electronic book to read with Microsoft's new ClearType technology.

Intrinsic adds functionality to business users, facilitating enterprise connectivity and a remote-management capability for multiple Pocket PCs. It allows a company to link together a system of these handhelds to be connected back to head office.

Priced between \$499 US and \$599 US, the Pocket PCs are at the high end of the market for handhelds that synchronize with personal computers, a concept first introduced by Palm in March 1996. The Palm IIIc, the first Palm organizer to include a colour screen, sells for about \$449 US.

Microsoft executives said the biggest plus for the Pocket PC is that it can run a number of programs simultaneously. For example, a user can listen to MP3 music files, play a video game and look up a phone number at the same time.