

Partners launch new handheld PC today

Microsoft's third try at a handheld device will feature easier on-screen reading.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — Microsoft Corp. and its partners are expected to unveil a new handheld organizer today that they hope will compete strongly with market leader Palm Computing Inc.

The Pocket PC, Microsoft's third try at creating a successful handheld device, will feature an improved Internet browser, easier on-screen reading, a digital voice recorder and a Windows Media music player.

With additional plug-in hardware, the various models — built by Compaq Computer, Hewlett-Packard and Casio Computer — will also support wireless Internet connections and have additional memory storage.

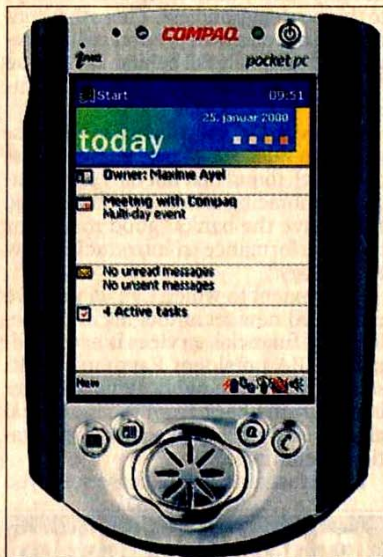
Priced from \$499 and \$599 US (\$750 and \$900 Cdn), Pocket PCs are at the high end of the market for handhelds that synchronize with personal computers, a concept first introduced by Palm in March 1996.

The Palm IIIc, the first Palm organizer to include a colour screen, sells for about \$449 US (\$676 Cdn).

"We're still a little high, but we give a little extra functionality," Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer said. Ballmer said he is already using the product for notes, e-mail and a little bit of video golf between meetings.

Two Vancouver companies, Intrinsyc Software Inc. and Infowave, are participating in today's launch. Intrinsyc's chief executive officer Derek Spratt, said the launch has been long awaited.

"It is give for business for Intrinsyc," Spratt said. "It's great, they've got a good release here."



COMPAQ'S IPAQ: A new handheld organizer with larger icons and fewer pull-down menus.

"It's great under the hood and they have some tweaks that will really turn things around for them," he said of Microsoft's foray into the handheld market.

Intrinsyc supplies solutions to enable developers to create applications that can remotely manage PocketPCs and integrate multiple units into a company's electronic business sys-

tems.

It specializes in network devices and the management of those devices. Spratt said his Intrinsyc's software solutions allow companies to manage devices remotely over networks.

Previous versions of the handhelds, running on the Windows CE operating system, were slow, expensive and unpopular.

The old screens looked like a miniaturized Windows 95 interface, complete with the same icons and Start button, and burned through battery power quickly.

On the new Pocket PCs, the interface looks more like Palm's, with larger icons and fewer pull-down menus. Most functions require a single touch. Battery life has improved as well.

Even Palm's premier models don't feature the perks of the Pocket PC. For example, the only device that offers

any kind of music player is Handspring Inc.'s Visor, built on the Palm operating system. Visor, introduced last November, requires a plug-in module for its music player.

While the Palm IIIc offers a colour screen, few other improvements were made to the basic Palm software.

The Palm VII, also \$449 US, has a built-in wireless Internet connection, but allows limited access to only a handful of Web sites.

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.