



Ross Ipsa Loquitur

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The Urge to Converge: Lawyers Fight “Digital Waist Clutter” with Smartphones

by

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For many lawyers, the start of the workday begins before we leave home. On our desks or the shelf where we hang our car keys is an array of digital gadgetry that keeps us on time, up to date, and connected. Most of these devices attach to our belts, via an assortment of clips, hooks, loops, and straps. Those with purses need to be sure to allow for the extra 8 lbs. of carrying weight.

The Monday through Friday morning techno.checklist has become all too familiar for these poor souls: Palm/PDA? Check. Cell phone? Check. Blackberry? Check. Pager? Check. Kids? Hey, where are the kids? By the time all of these communication enablers (or perhaps they should be called “life disablers”?) are strapped around one’s waist, it’s hard not to feel like a plumber going to work in the morning.

Making a 747’s pre-flight checklist look like child’s plan, the morning ritual of strapping on all this electronic gizmotry is hardly the end of the day’s suffering. Inevitably, one or more of the “must have, can’t practice without it” devices finds itself orphaned, left on the table at a deposition, or on the floor of a restroom, victim of a less than reliable belt clip. It’s madness, sheer unadulterated and slavish insanity.

We’ve all experienced it - the dreaded affliction which should be called “Digital Waist Clutter” or just: “DWC.” A syndrome that cries out for its own prevention-focused association, support groups, 24 hour crisis intervention lines, and maybe a Dr. Phil or Oprah episode of its very own.

Can anything be done about it? The answer, thank goodness, is YES! Give in to the “urge to converge” - consolidate those myriad parts and pieces into a single, convenient, compact Smartphone. I took the leap more than two years ago - improving the quality of my digital life markedly. I’ll personally NEVER go back to being “unconverged.”

What are Smartphones? They’re essentially cell phones on steroids: combining digital cell phone technology, a PDA and the wireless communications savoir faire of a Blackberry, there’s little these digi-wonders don’t do. Smartphones combine cell phones with either Palm, Pocket PC or Microsoft Windows Smartphone devices - with full wireless e-mail and Internet access. So one device really does it all. Generally, Smartphones are purchased from cell service providers

- AT&T, Cingular, Sprint, U.S. Cellular and Verizon all have various Smartphone permutations available. E-mail and Internet access time either counts as cell service plan "minutes" or often can be part of an unlimited use add-on.

I'm on my third Smartphone (all have been devices which run the Palm OS for their PDA functions - which still make more sense for legal users than Pocket PCs if you plan on syncing with any legal-focused applications such as most case managers, billing systems for timeslip entry, etc.). My first was a Kyocera 6035 Smartphone from Verizon, followed by its successor, the Kyocera Smartphone 7135. In the last month I've moved to Sprint and a PalmOne (formerly Handspring) Treo 600.

My love affair with Smartphones began with a brick-like, 8 ounce Kyocera 6035 Smartphone - the first truly usable converged device. Melding a tri-mode digital cellphone with Palm PDA, it was a sturdy, albeit a bit clumsy, workhorse. Virtually indestructible, mine survived multiple swan dives off of desks, tables and onto hard concrete parking surfaces. It's speakerphone rivaled the performance of a \$1000 dedicated conference room unit we have in the office. The drawbacks? It was big. It wasn't color. It wasn't cool.

Then came the long-delayed and much anticipated replacement - Kyocera's 7135 Smartphone. Instead of the 6035's "brick" style, the new unit was a more compact "clamshell" design. With a feature set that the Smartphone cognoscenti salivated over, the 7135 brought a faster Palm processor, the "newer" Palm OS v. 4.1, a color display, an SD card slot for memory expansion and that ultimate of intangible qualities - the "digital cool factor." After almost a year of reliable use, my 7135 took an about face with battery life issues and ultimately, a series of thoroughly irritating failures. Apparently I was not alone - there were many reports of similar problems with the Kyocera 7135 model, leading to its unofficial demise from its sole source - Verizon.

I very briefly moved to a Samsung i600. This is a Smartphone that runs a little-known version of Microsoft Windows called Windows 2002 Smartphone Edition (apparently a 2004 edition will be released shortly). The best description I can give is that it yields a device with about 1/4 the capabilities of a Pocket PC PDA. In other words, so poorly implemented as to be just south of useless. That bad. Example - I configured the unit to check my office e-mail. Pleased, I clicked through the list of 120 e-mails it downloaded. Most were spam so of course, I wanted to select all those and delete them. Sorry. No can do. Not with a Windows 2002 Smartphone. I would have had to individually press the little navigation buttons (because this unit does NOT have a touchscreen like all other Smartphone PDAs) about five times to delete EACH message individually. It would have taken two hours. Check please? It's in a box on my shelf. Nice enough phone - positively worthless PDA.

After two months of teeth-gnashing aggravation with the Kyocera headaches and the Microsoft Smartphone (come on, be honest - it should be called a MoronPhone), I gave up on Verizon, and decided that I really have always wanted to be able to thumbtype my e-mails vis-a-vis the Blackberry wireless e-mail devices I used for a few months in 2000. That meant one option only - the PalmOne (née Handspring) Treo 600. While no fan of Sprint, Verizon no longer offered a Palm-compatible Smartphone and with AT&T the only other option, the lure of free PCS to PCS calling got the better of me and I became a Sprint customer (victim?) again.

The Treo 600: I have to say that this is the first wireless/handheld/PDA thingie that I actually LOVE! And that's EVERYTHING about it. I don't have a single substantive negative to say about it (other than a 610 model is coming "real soon now" that will have Bluetooth wireless connectivity and of course will mean my 600 is "old" and thus, far less

cool). Others have exhaustively reviewed the Treo 600 so I won't attempt to duplicate their efforts. Just a few salient comments.

Treo 600 units are offered in both CDMA and GSM versions - Sprint offers the CDMA products (and maybe Cingular also). AT&T has the GSM version (and possibly T-Mobile also). GSM is the cell phone standard the entire rest of the civilized world outside the U.S. uses - it would be especially attractive to lawyers whose cases take them overseas periodically.

From the Palm side, it's quick, with a 144 mhz processor that leaves my 44 mhz Kyocera behind in the eDust. The 160x160 pixel color screen is terrific - so bright that it can double as a flashlight to help guide the way up a dark stairway at home at night. With the Handspring Blazer Palm web browser, the Internet experience on the large display is just superb - with no real limitation on viewing websites other than the fact that this is about a 2" x 3" display space.

What convinced me, after years of so much "Graffiti" indoctrination ("Graffiti" and "Graffiti 2" are the handwriting styles used to enter information on a Palm OS PDA using a stylus) that my pen-based handwriting was often coming out in Graffiti-like characters, was the great little Blackberry-like keyboard. The Treo 600 has a full QWERTY layout miniature keyboard. Familiar to users of Blackberry wireless PDA devices, the best technique is to use one's thumbs. It really is surprising how quickly one can type, accurately, with a pair of thumbs. Even stylus-based Graffiti can be done with add-on Graffiti Anywhere free software (and even possibly to "downgrade" from the godawful Graffiti 2 to the "REAL" Graffiti (the original version)).

Other pertinent details: the Treo 600 weight about 6 ounces, has a built-in and unfortunately non-user replaceable lithium ion battery, has a built-in 640x480 VGA digital camera, has an SD card slot and comes with a charging/Hotsync cable (but no cradle - cradles are available as an aftermarket option). The standard memory complement is 32 MB, but the SD card slot allows up to another 512 MB of program and data storage. The speakerphone is as impressive as my original Kyocera 6035 - very usable. Battery life so far is impressive - about 3+ hours of constant talk time - much longer Palm runtime. On the Sprint PCS network, e-mails download quickly and web browsing feels faster than a dial-up modem - quite acceptable.

At prices ranging from \$399 to \$549 depending on the "special offer du jour" from the cell provider, the Treo 600 is a bargain. In the truest sign of digital commitment, I've loaded up on an array of Treo 600 accessories and software, to the point of near obsession. I'm using the low-cost SnapperMail e-mail software and a great Palm interface replacement called Launcher X (from the Snapper people). I have a small war chest filled with various travel chargers, syncing adapters, screen covers, and a brilliantly designed, form-fitting leather protective case from Bellagio. Most of these "necessities" are available from TreoCentral.com, which also hosts a very active series of Treo-focused web discussion forums. I couldn't be happier with it. Lots of great accessories available (always important!) and a large community of users (www.treocentral.com) to talk with.

So consider strongly the urge to converge - consolidating your cell, wireless e-mail and Net access, Palm into a single Smartphone device. Help lawyers everywhere stamp out the scourge that is Digital Waist Clutter!

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