

The Best Products *of the Year*



By the Editors of
Handheld Computing

Good grief—it's award time of year. Last time around, we argued so viciously over PDA of the Year that Rick eventually smashed a whisky bottle and staggered around the conference room, threatening Dave and Denny with broken shards until the police arrived. Again. Such is the life of *Handheld Computing* editors.

This time around was no easier. 2003 was the year that smartphones, GPS, and hard disk-based MP3 players really hit their stride. Digital cameras in all price and feature categories matured—high end models in 2003 rivaled anything you could buy for film, while smaller cameras reveled in their ability to fit in your pocket without making a crease. Palm's OS 5 finally realized its potential in models like the Tungsten T3, giving the Pocket PC a run for its money. Everywhere you looked, there was enough innovation and clever engineering to get even Dr. Emmett Brown all wound up. So we locked ourselves away yet again and vowed not to emerge until we agreed on the *Handheld Computing* Best Products of 2003—or died trying.



**PDA of the Year:
Garmin iQue**

PDA of the Year: Garmin iQue

Palm OS • Garmin • www.garmin.com • \$589

The iQue faced the stiffest competition for the coveted PDA of the Year award we've ever seen. But it pulled through for one very simple reason: there's no other handheld like it in all the world. Think about it—it's a Palm OS 5 PDA with a half-VGA screen and virtual Graffiti area. It has 32MB of RAM and an SD card slot. But it's also a darn good GPS receiver with navigation tools built into ROM. Wow. It's what George Jetson would have wanted, rest his animated soul.

Finalists

Tungsten T3 • PalmOne • www.palmone.com • \$399

iPAQ h2210 • HP • www.hp.com • \$399.99

Most Innovative PDA: Tapwave Zodiac

Palm OS • TapWave • www.tapwave.com • \$299.99

With high-speed graphics, stereo speakers, and the best controls this side of the PlayStation 2, the Zodiac is a gamer's dream handheld. But it's also primed to do serious work, with a 320x480 screen that works in both portrait and landscape modes, 128MB of RAM (in the \$399 Zodiac₂), Bluetooth, and dual SD expansion slots. Ergonomics and usability are fantastic, down to the removable flip cover and heavy stylus. This is one handheld that gets everything right.



Finalists

Clie PEG-UX50 • Sony • www.sonystyle.com • \$649.99

Toshiba Pocket PC e850 • Toshiba • www.toshiba.com • \$599.99

Best Power PDA: Clie NX80V

Palm OS • Sony • www.sonystyle.com • \$549.99

Clie NX80V, how do we love thee? Let us count the ways. Thy articulating body offers us virtual Graffiti and a divine thumb-keyboard with nighttime illumination. Thou bringest half VGA, a 1.3 megapixel digital camera with a camera assist light, and dual memory slots. Herewith, we can finally use both Memory Stick and CompactFlash at the same time, and for that we are grateful. Addeth a Sony Wi-Fi card, and we are a' rockin'. We love thee, NX80V.



Finalists

Tungsten C • PalmOne • www.palmone.com • \$499

iPAQ h5550 • HP • www.hp.com • \$649.99

Best Wireless PDA: iPAQ h4150

Pocket PC • HP • www.hp.com • \$449

Built-in wireless used to mean a protruding CompactFlash card or a giant PDA like the iPAQ h5450. Now HP has done the seemingly impossible by cramming both Wi-Fi and Bluetooth radios into a compact, slimline PDA that's little larger than its slimline h1940. With its super-sharp screen, removable battery, and excellent controls, the h4150 is a no-compromise Pocket PC. And if you prefer a thumb keyboard to writing with a stylus, another \$50 will net you the nearly identical h4350, which also boasts a larger battery.



Finalists

Axim X3i • Dell • www.dell.com • \$379

Clie UX50 • Sony • www.sonystyle.com • \$649.99

Company of the Year: PalmOne

We'll admit it: we had just about written off Palm, Inc., at least as a hardware company. But in 2003, the company pulled off a major comeback, starting with the introduction of two crucial models: the power-packed Tungsten C, the first Palm OS PDA to really stand toe-to-toe with Pocket PCs; and the Zire 71, a fun and affordable consumer model that cemented OS 5's multimedia prowess. The rest of the year would witness four more inventive and invigorative models, including our PDA of the Year Finalist, the Tungsten T3. In the interim, Palm acquired Handspring, spun off PalmSource, and adopted the new name PalmOne. Reports of this company's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

Best Entry-Level PDA: Tungsten E

Palm OS • PalmOne • www.palmone.com • \$199

\$199 sounds like the price tag for an entry-level PDA; the Tungsten E is anything but. The true heir-apparent to the illustrious Palm V, the E trades on its classy looks and smart design. The only thing more dazzling than its silver shell is its ultra-bright high-resolution screen. PalmOne also serves up 32MB of RAM, an MP3 player, lots of great software (including Documents To Go), and an SD slot. If there's a catch, we haven't found it yet.



Finalists

Zire 21 • PalmOne •

www.palmone.com • \$99

iPAQ h1935 • HP • www.hp.com •

\$199.99

Best Smartphone: T-Mobile Color Sidekick

Smartphone • T-Mobile • www.t-mobile.com • \$249.99

The aliens have landed, and they want their cell phone back. Too bad, pipe cleaner necks, you can't have it—because T-Mobile is selling it as the Sidekick. We mostly liked the 2002 version of this weird, puck-shaped phone, but the 2003 version—with a color screen—is amazing. From the Matrix-like snap-and-swivel screen to the comfortable keyboard to the no-nonsense interface for accessing contacts, e-mail, games, instant messaging, and the snap-on digital camera, this is the one smartphone that gets just about everything right. As long as you're under 21, that is—50 year old business travelers look downright goofy with this gadget.



Finalists

T-Mobile Pocket PC •

T-Mobile • www.t-mobile.com • \$399.99

Treo 600 • PalmOne •
www.palmone.com • \$449

Best HD MP3 Player: Apple iPod

MP3 • Apple • www.apple.com • \$299-499

Despite facing stiff competition from a bevy of clones, the iPod still reigns supreme among hard drive-based audio players. The third-generation model comes with 10GB, 20GB, or a whopping 40GB of storage, all packed into the slimmest, chicest shell we can imagine. Third-party add-ons can turn it into a voice recorder or digital-photo repository. And let's not forget Apple's groundbreaking iTunes service, now available for Windows, which sells songs for 99 cents apiece. Needless to say, the iPod rocks on.



Finalists

Archos AV320 • Archos • www.archos.com • \$599.95

Dell DJ • Dell • www.dell.com • \$249

Best Flash MP3 Player: Creative MuVo NX

MP3 • Creative • www.us.creative.com • \$149.99 - \$199.99

For the MuVo series, the second time is definitely the charm. Creative's sophomore effort combines a robust MP3 player (and voice recorder!) with a 128MB or 256MB flash key. Just plug it into a USB port (no cable required) and download your favorite files or tunes. The lighter-sized NX makes an excellent exercise companion, as Creative supplies both an armband and a belt-clip case. You'll probably want to bring your own headphones, as the MuVo's earbuds do get a little uncomfortable. But don't let that stop you from buying this classy, capable multi-purpose MP3 player.



Finalists

RCA Lyra RD1080 • RCA • www.rca.com • \$149.99

Idea0 WF-200 • Ideao • www.ideao.com • \$89.99

Best Compact Digital Camera: Casio Exilim EX-S3

Digital Camera • Casio •

www.casiousa.com • \$349.99

What can we say? If you want to see thin, forget about Calista Flockhart and the plot to Matrix Revolutions—check out the Exilim EX-S3, a camera no thicker than four stacked credit cards. It's one of the smallest digital cameras we've ever used—yet it has 12MB of memory for storing images without a memory card, an SD slot, and even a handful of



programmed auto-exposure modes for common photo situations. We've got one in our pocket right now.

Finalists

Minolta Dimage XT • Minolta • www.minoltausa.com • \$399

Canon PowerShot S400 • Canon • www.canonusa.com • \$599

Best Mid-Range Digital Camera:

Kodak EasyShare DX6440

Digital Camera • Kodak • www.kodak.com • \$399.95

Looking for a smart, practical, affordable camera that makes digital photography fun? We've got your Kodak EasyShare DX6440 right

here. Not only does its 4 megapixels take superb pictures, but it has a rich 4x optical zoom, plenty of automatic and manual controls, and cool extras like automatic image rotation so all your images pop out right side up. The best part: Kodak's optional Printer Dock which spits out 4x6-inch dye sub prints with one touch simplicity.



Finalists

Panasonic DMC-FZ10 • Panasonic • www.panasonic.com • \$599.95

Pentax Optio555 • Pentax • www.pentax.com • \$599.95

Best Semi-Pro Digital Camera:

Sony CyberShot DSC-F717

Digital Camera • Sony • www.sonystyle.com • \$799

If you're serious about your digital photography but you're not keen on getting into a Digital SLR and a bagful of interchangeable lenses, you can choose from among a handful of semi-pro, high-megapixel cameras. The hands-down winner for 2003 was Sony's CyberShot DSC-F717. And while it looks like a cross between a cyborg's arm and a camera for your Aibo, it packs a 5x optical zoom, multiple metering options, infrared night photography, and a dozen other killer features. You can even edit video clips from the camera's movie mode while they're still in the camera!



Finalists

Olympus Camedia C-5050 • Olympus • www.olympusamerica.com • \$699

Canon PowerShot G5 • Canon • www.canonusa.com • \$899.95

Best PDA Accessory: Palm Wireless Keyboard

Palm OS • PalmOne • www.palmone.com • \$69.95



Wireless, schwireless. After playing with other infrared PDA keyboards, we were ready to write off the whole category. But

Palm's new wireless keyboard is a knockout. The keys themselves have a smart layout, solid feel, and good throw. You can attach almost any Palm OS PDA and even vary the orientation—the new Tungsten T3 works in 480x320 landscape mode, for instance. And when you're all done, it folds like a Frenchman playing poker. It's quite possibly the best PDA keyboard we've ever used.

Finalists

Margi Presenter-to-Go • Margi • www.margi.com • \$199

Belkin Quadra 4-in-1 Stylus • Belkin • www.belkin.com • \$24.99

Best PDA Case: Proporta Aluminum Case

Peripheral • Proporta • www.proporta.com • \$31.85

We've yet to meet a Proporta Aluminum Case we didn't like. They're equal parts rugged and stylish, with holes cut in all the right places for accoutrements like speakers and expansion slots. Some of the cases even have slots for extra SD cards. Best of all, Proporta wastes no time in supporting the latest PDAs; a compatible case usually appears within a month of a new model's introduction. If you want the ultimate protection for your handheld, look no further.



Finalists

Rhinoskin Titanium •

Rhinoskin • www.rhinoskin.com • \$69.95

Covertec Luxury Leather Case • Covertec • www.covertec.com • \$39.95

Trend of the Year: 99-cent Songs

Having overcharged music customers for decades, the record industry has finally hit upon the magic formula to forestall illegal downloads: 99-cent songs. Witness Apple's iTunes store, the first to offer such a deal: it sold a million songs inside of a week. Now, everyone is following suit: at press time, MusicMatch, Napster 2.0, and RealOne Rhapsody had just unveiled similar stores, the latter already setting the stage for a price war by charging just 79 cents per song. At this rate, it won't be long before you're paying 50 cents for a song by 50 Cent—and at that point, who needs file sharing?

Best Portable Power: iGo Juice

Peripheral • iGo • www.igo.com • \$119.99

Are all the power “bricks” you have to carry when you travel starting to live up to their names? iGo's Juice lets you lighten your load by consolidating all your power adapters into one. In addition to replacing your notebook's power brick, Juice can also simultaneously charge your PDA or cell phone using an optional Peripheral Power System cable. With AC, auto, and airliner power adapters included, you can “Juice up” just about anywhere.

Finalists

Zip-Linq • ZIP-LINQ •
www.ziplinq.com • \$19.99
Arkon Powered PDA
Mount • Arkon •
www.arkon.com
• \$69.95



Best Wireless Accessory: SanDisk SD Wi-Fi Card

Peripheral • SanDisk • www.sandisk.com • \$199.99

Need to add WiFi, but don't have a CompactFlash slot? The tiny SanDisk WiFi card slips into an SDIO slot and adds 802.11b compatibility. Range and performance are good, and detailed setup instructions are included. Drivers are included for a variety of Pocket PC models (check the company's web site for compatibility), and Palm OS 5 drivers were slated to be available for download before the end of 2003.



Finalists

Enfora Wireless LAN Portfolio • Enfora •
www.enfora.com • \$139-\$169
D-Link DBT-120 Bluetooth adapter • D-Link • www.d-link.com • \$45

Best GPS PDA Software: Socket Bluetooth GPS

Pocket PC • Socket • www.socketcom.com • \$399

If you ask us, GPS hardware isn't nearly as important as the software. All GPS receivers track 12 satellites and report your location to within 30 feet or so. But it's software like the package that comes with Socket's Bluetooth GPS that gets our attention. You can install detailed maps a city at a time or grab entire states, simplifying installation (no need to know what county you're traveling in, for instance). In operation, it recalculates routes, offers easy pan and zoom, and even has a “fog mode” that beeps to alert you to upcoming intersections. Sweet.



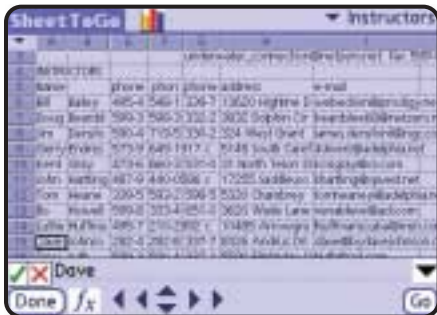
Finalists

ALK CoPilot Pocket PC 4 • ALK • www.alk.com • \$199
TomTom Navigator • TomTom • www.tomtom.com • \$319.95

Palm Software

Best Business Program: Documents to Go 6

Palm OS • DataViz • www.dataviz.com • \$49.95



Documents to Go 6

The calendar may say 2003, but the 21st Century didn't really start until DataViz released Documents To Go 6, the first office suite for *any* PDA to read and write Word and Excel files in their native format. Get a Word attachment via

e-mail on your Treo? No problem. Edit it and forward it on to someone's desktop without affecting one whit of Word formatting. Now that's progress, and that makes DTG 6 absolutely essential for any Palm OS road warrior.

Finalists

CardScan Executive • CardScan • www.cardscan.com • \$249

Repligo • Cerience • www.repligo.com • \$29.95

Best Core-App Replacement: Agendus Pro

Palm OS • Iambic • www.iambic.com • \$39.95



Agendus Pro

Looking for better contacts, scheduling, and e-mail than your Palm OS device currently offers? Iambic feels your pain. We love the way Agendus Pro enhances the capabilities of all the core functions of your PDA and then also perfectly synchronizes with an all-new desktop PIM application. There's something here for everyone—better sorting and categorizing, helpful event icons, a unified Today view, and full-screen support for half-VGA PDAs.

Finalists

KeySuite • Chapura • www.chapura.com • \$79.99

TakePhone • ShSh • www.shsh.com • \$19.95

Best Launcher: SilverScreen

Palm OS • Pocket Sensei • www.pocketsensei.com • \$24.95

Like Halle Berry in a skimpy swimsuit, SilverScreen 3.0 is a work of art. Yes, some of our finalists have more raw features, but no other launcher looks prettier on your PDA's screen. SilverScreen is

compatible with a huge number of themes, runs full-screen on devices with virtual Graffiti, and supports background images for even more visual flair. Of course, it supports drag and drop trash, categories, and beaming, but also offers innovative tickertapes that display news, TV listings, and other options.

Finalists

LauncherX • Little Mobile

Creations • www.launcherx.com •

\$24.95

ZLauncher • ZZTechs •

www.zztechs.com • \$12



SilverScreen

Best Audio Player: Pocket Tunes

Palm OS • NormSoft • www.pocket-tunes.com • \$19.95



PocketTunes

Pocket Tunes offers just about everything you'd want in a PDA audio player: support for playlists, an auto-bookmark option, a graphic equalizer, and a growing selection of *suh-weet* skins. You can play your music in the background, turn off the screen to improve battery life, and even load up Ogg Vorbis-format tunes (if you're into that sort of thing). Plus, if you pay \$19.95 for the Deluxe version, you get free updates for life. AeroPlayer runs it a very close second, but we think Pocket Tunes is the ultimate audio player.

Finalists

AeroPlayer • Aerodrome Software • www.aerodrome.us • \$14.95

Audible Player • Audible • www.audible.com • Free

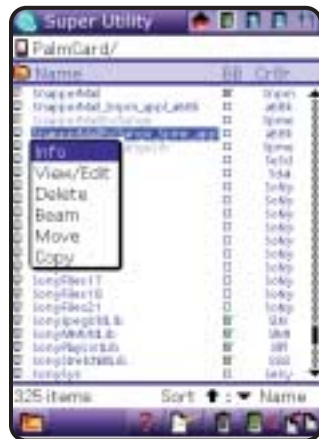
Surprise of the Year: Wi-Fi Everywhere

Wi-Fi has been on a slow-but-steady growth trajectory since its initial consumer release in 1999, but 2003 was the year that the lid was ripped off wireless networking. In just a year's time, the average cost of a Wi-Fi card or access point fell by 50 percent, and public access to Wi-Fi has become almost ubiquitous in many cities. By mid-year, you could routinely find Wi-Fi in retail locations like Starbucks, McDonalds, and Borders, all courtesy of T-Mobile. Then Verizon launched its own Wi-Fi service in Manhattan, located at public payphones throughout the city. Truly, 2003 was the year that we got our first real taste of anywhere, anytime wireless Internet.

Best Utility: SuperUtility

Palm OS • Handmark • www.handmark.com • \$19.99

Power users need powerful utilities, and we've yet to find one more potent than SuperUtility. True to its name, this tool lets you view, copy, move, beam, and delete files in RAM and on memory cards. You can create folders, launch applications, and get detailed information regarding your PDA's memory, battery, OS, and more. SuperUtility even has a Hex editor designed with software developers in mind.



SuperUtility

Finalists

FileZ • nosleep software • www.nosleep.net • Free

Missing Sync • Mark/Space • www.markspace.com • \$19.95

MVP: SnapperMail

Palm OS • Snapperfish • www.snappermail.com • \$39.95



SnapperMail

Until SnapperMail came along, getting full-featured e-mail services on your Palm OS PDA was something of a challenge. Now that we use the ol' Snapper, we don't even think twice about downloading zipped attachments to extract and edit Word files. And if your e-mail client doesn't support multiple e-mail accounts, automatic e-mail retrieval,

active links in e-mail messages, and signatures, you need to give this cream-of-the-crop e-mail program a try.

Technology of the Year: GPS

GPS has arrived. Actually, the satellites that comprise the Global Positioning System have been orbiting the planet for years, but it was only in 2003 that they became a household name—and an indispensable travel companion. Leading the charge was Garmin's iQue 3600, our PDA of the Year winner and the first PDA with a GPS receiver built in. Other vendors churned out GPS add-on kits for Palm OS and Pocket PC handhelds, meaning you can now use nearly any model to navigate from point A to point B. 2004 will likely bring even better mapping software, but we'll always remember 2003 as the year GPS hardware fell to Earth.

Finalists

Kinoma Producer 2 • Kinoma • www.kinoma.com • \$29.99
(Player is free)

SplashPhoto • SplashData • www.splashdata.com • \$29.95

Best Game: Warfare Incorporated

Palm OS • Handmark • www.handmark.com • \$29.99

Life is tough here on Icarus. ACME Exploration Corp expects us to mine resources from this planet while defending our position from rival corporations and alien influences. You might think it's hard to collect ore, build combat vehicles, train soldiers, and fight in real time on a puny PDA screen, but you'd be wrong—Handmark deserves a medal for making real time combat fun on the PDA. It's best if you have a half-VGA display, but we've had a blast even on 320x320 displays. This is a game you won't be able to put down until you've finished all two-dozen missions.



Warfare Incorporated

Finalists

Aggression • Blit Games • www.blitgames.com • \$14.95

Bookworm • Astraware • www.astraware.com • \$14.95

Pocket PC Software

Best Business Program: Pocket Informant 4.6

Pocket PC • WebIS • www.pocketinformant.com • \$24.95

Pocket Informant replaces the core Calendar, Contacts, and Tasks applications with supercharged, visually enhanced equivalents. It also adds a slick note-taking module and an outstanding search engine. And it's all wrapped up in a unified interface that lets you link entries between modules, making it easier than ever to organize your important data. There are tons of small but appreciated touches, such as the ability to dial a phone using Bluetooth or touch-tones.



Pocket Informant

Finalists

Agenda Fusion 5 • Developer One • www.developerone.com • \$29.95

ThunderHawk • Bitstream • www.bitstream.com • \$49.95/year

Best Core-App Replacement: TextMaker

Pocket PC • SoftMaker • www.softmaker.de • \$11.11

TextMaker is the word processor your Pocket PC was meant to have. It's not only the most robust program of its type we've ever seen on a handheld PC, it can open and save documents in a variety of formats—including Word (all versions, from 6.0 to XP), Pocket Word, Rich Text Format, and even HTML 4.0. What's more, it's remarkably easy to use, with icons that actually look like their function and menus that closely resemble those of a desktop word processor. Hey, Microsoft—steal this program!



TextMaker

Finalists

BugMe • Electric Pocket • www.electricpocket.com • \$19.95

PocketTV Classic • MpegTV • www.pockettv.com • Free

Best Utility: Nyditot Virtual Display



Nyditot Virtual Display

Pocket PC • Nyditot • www.nyditot.com • \$19.99

Perhaps the most annoying omission in the Pocket PC operating system is the lack of a landscape mode. For spreadsheets and web browsing, 240 pixels across is just too cramped. Enter Nyditot ("Now why Didn't I Think Of That?") Virtual Display, which not only lets you rotate the screen, but also lets you create oversized virtual screens—800x600, anyone? You can scroll around

the large screens, or zoom out to a thumbnail view. A must-have for Pocket PC web browsers and spreadsheet jockeys.

Finalists

Resco Explorer • Resco • www.resco-net.com • \$19.95

StartPad • Stellarmetrics • www.stellarmetrics.com • \$5

MVP: SplashPhoto

Pocket PC • SplashData • www.splashdata.com • \$29.95

The best image viewer on the Palm OS has been enhanced for the Pocket PC. SplashPhoto has all the expected features—you can rotate images to fit on a landscape screen, create slideshows, view thumbnails, and so on. The viewer is blazingly fast,

whether showing PDA-sized pictures or larger shots from your digital camera. SplashPhoto's trump card is its excellent desktop Windows companion app, which lets you select, resize, crop, and adjust photos for optimal PDA display.

Finalists

Journal Bar • Omega One • www.omegaone.com • \$14.99

Pocket Quicken • Landware • www.landware.com • \$39.95



SplashPhoto

Best Game: Age of Empires

Pocket PC • Mobile Digital Media • www.gomdm.com • \$29.95

There's no better proof of the Pocket PC's power as a gaming platform than Age of Empires, a perfect port of the desktop classic. And now that Mobile Digital Media has put it on a memory card, you needn't sacrifice some 30MB of internal memory to play it. Age of Empires delivers real-time strategy goodness, as you try to build your empire, advance through the ages, and conquer your foes. As Comic Book Guy might say: "Best...Pocket PC game...ever!"



SplashPhoto

Finalists

IntelliGolf • Karrier Communications • www.intelligolf.com • \$39.99

Darxide • Frontier Developments • www.frontier.co.uk.com • \$6.99♦

Most Improved Designs: Hewlett-Packard

This is not your father's iPAQ. While the h5500 series is dutifully carrying along the tradition of big, powerful, and ultra-expandable Pocket PCs, HP has expanded the iPAQ line to offer PDAs for a wide variety of audiences. The h1940 is slim and inexpensive, the h2210 compact yet expandable, and the h4150 boasts more power-per-cubic-inch than any other handheld. The company's also lead the wireless way, with Bluetooth in virtually every model and a pair of Bluetooth/Wi-Fi combo units. Looks like the merger of HP and Compaq was a good thing for handheld users. (Now if they'd just re-hire the guy who knew it would be a good idea to include a flip-cover on the Jornada...)