



No strings attached

Mark Whitehorn looks at **stringless connections** and unravels knotty PDA connectivity problems.

It was my intention, this month, to go into the nitty-gritty of connecting PDAs to the internet. However, I have been deluged by a whole series of communications which discuss alternatives to the “traditional” PDA-modem-phone socket-ISP way of doing things. It seemed worth airing these for the sake of those who are still undecided.

For example, “gorgeous” Steve Goddard <gorgeous@globalnet.co.uk> wonders whether the wet string approach is outmoded. “I have just purchased a Psion Series 5 and own a mobile telephone, so I made some enquiries on how to use them together. It would appear that a good option is to replace my mobile with an Ericsson SH888, which has a built-in modem and IrDA port. Ericsson has supplied the correct settings to configure it all properly (on two Word docs). Are there any potential problems I have missed in buying the phone, as it all appears too good to be true. I am wondering why everyone else isn't doing the same or at least telling us all what a good idea it would be!”

As an aside, you have to admire anyone who uses a name like [gorgeous@globalnet!](mailto:gorgeous@globalnet.co.uk) For many years I was Penguin@CIX and that used to get me into enough trouble. Take my advice: never, ever, post anything to the newsgroup alt.penguin-fetish. recovery (yes, it really exists) when your

wonderful things, but so will the 600, 700 or 800 series phones. So, if you already have one of those, read on.

All you need is the DI27 data accessory, an infra-red modem compatible with most PDAs (not just Psions). It is tiny, weighs less than 10g and measures 23 x 46 x 14mm — let's say about the size of a matchbox and about the same weight as a

cute little Nokia 9000 out of his pocket. But the 9000 is a mobile phone and, as such, is neither cute nor little — the term “brick-like” springs to mind — yet if you compare its size and weight to those of a PDA... well, OK, so it's still a little lumpy. But consider how carrying a PDA and a mobile phone will badly mess up your Armani suit; suddenly, the Nokia seems quite svelte because it is



both a phone and a PDA. It makes sense. Most of us will use a PC at the office or at home for internet stuff. It is only when we're on the move that we want to use a PDA for web browsing and email.

▲ THE
NOKIA 9000
FITS YOUR
ARMANI SUIT
A TREAT

Combining the PDA and phone is definitely a masterstroke. I borrowed one from

cigarette lighter. Utilising the IrDA protocol enables you to exchange data with the Psion 5, any PC featuring an IrDA port and Windows CE 2.0 PDAs, and the Palm 3.

Steve also wonders how he can get SMS (short message services) to work on the Psion 5, since the Psion message suite doesn't support SMS (Vodafone in his case) handling. I would welcome comments from readers.

'I wrote and sent this message from a Nokia in the back of a taxi in Paris'

name is Penguin. There are some *very* strange people on the internet.

The answer is that I have no idea why using a Psion and an SH888 should be a bad idea. It sounds wonderful to me. Has anyone out there tried it? If so, tell us how it went. I contacted Ericsson and was told that not only will the SH888 do all of these

■ Nokia masterstroke

The whole idea of PDAs, mobile phones and stringless connections so intrigues me that I was tempted to ask Ericsson for the loan of an SH888 to try it out. However, Big Bad Bob Walder (he of the *Hands On Networks* column) diverted me from this noble endeavour. In fact, it's Bob's fault that I'm in love — again. Yes, I know it was the same story last month, but this time it's different; this is the real thing.

Bob and I were talking about using PDAs on the internet and he pulled this

Nokia and I am genuinely impressed with the way in which the combination works. The Nokia has, in PDA mode, a perfectly respectable contacts/address book and calendar/appointment system. True, the interface is a little kludgy, but the integration with the phone is excellent. For instance, you can look up a contact and automatically call them at the press of a button. Astoundingly though, the Nokia has a built-in web browser. No cables, no configuring of external modems, no drivers — it's just there. All you need is an ISP account.

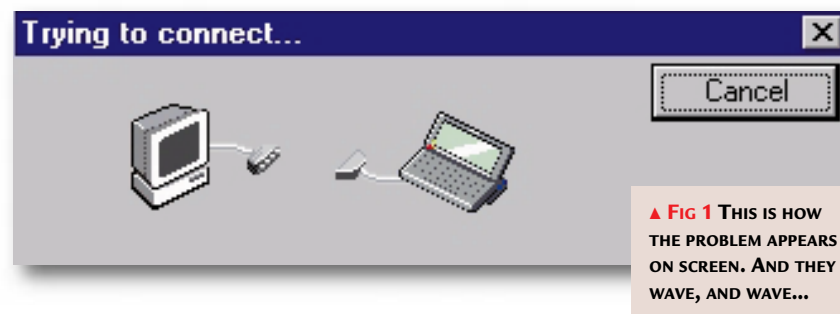
After a while, I got to love the Nokia, so parting at the end of the month will be a Romeo and Juliet affair. The only major problem (or so I thought) was that the keyboard is unsuitable for extended writing:

for a professional writer, this is a bit of a stumbling block. Then, in one of those odd twists which I am rapidly coming to accept as normal for this column, the following (abridged) message arrived in my email box, from John Edwards <john@jzedward.demon.co.uk>: "In your November '98 column you asked for comments on PDA sync apps following comments from a couple of Psion users. I recently upgraded from a Psion 3a to a Nokia 9000 and spent some time getting data into sync with Schedule+ and, later, Outlook 98. Below are my comments on the 'upgrade' to the Nokia. I hope you find the comments interesting."

Well, I did find it interesting, not least because the whole of John's email is 741 words long and ends with: "P.S. I wrote and sent this message from a Nokia in the back of a taxi in Paris." Unfortunately, his message, which is packed with interesting comments, is actually too long to include as part of this column but I have included it as a text file on our cover-mounted CD-ROM. What can I say? The Nokia keyboard is clearly perfectly usable, it just takes practice. And by the time you read this, the new, slimline version will be out.

■ Waving, not connecting

Another thread which has run through this column concerns connecting PDAs to PCs. Several issues ago I wrote that my Psion-



to-PC connection was flaky. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes I was left looking at a pair of waving wires [Fig 1]. I asked for email votes, with headers "Me too" if you had the same problem, or "Well, it works for me" if you didn't. The results were that 58 percent of respondents reported significant problems.

Clearly this survey is biased because people are more likely to respond if they are angry. So, I strongly suspect the truth is that the majority of

There is no single tweak or setting which will guarantee success

people are happy with PsiWin. However, I still consider this to be reasonable evidence that I am not alone with my troubles, and I have passed the figures on to Psion. Several readers reported that they had managed to overcome initial problems and included their cures for these. Having examined the remedies, I cannot really see a pattern. There is no single tweak or setting which will guarantee success. However,

the other side of the coin is that somewhere, buried deep in these emails, may be the cure for your connectivity problem.

Here is a selection of the replies I received.

➤ PsiSync utility

Mike Clark <Mike.Clark@btinternet.com> says: "I can highly recommend a shareware utility called PsiSync which is available for download from www.kerswell.demon.co.uk. I have been using this for several months and find that it works perfectly. There is an impressive Hot-Sync facility: whenever you

connect your Psion to the PC and switch it on, PsiSync detects it and automatically synchronises the calendar/agenda and tasks. You can limit this to once per day if you want. You can even choose a French interface in addition to several other languages."

➤ PsiWin 2.1 to PC

Joost Aerssens <j.aerssens@columbi.nl> comments: "For two weeks now I have been using a new PC, a Dell Latitude Cpi D266XT, equipped with an infra-red port which, of course, I would like to use instead of having to carry a cable everywhere I go.

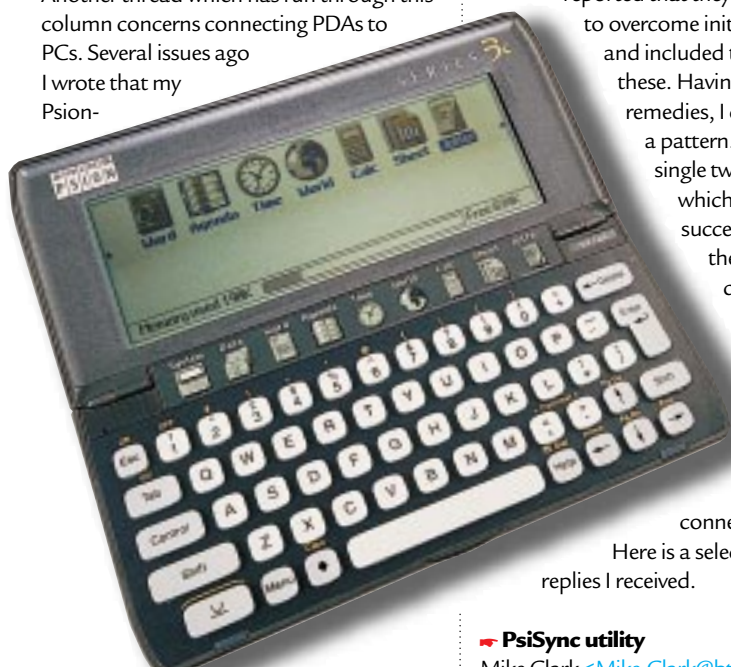
"Correctly installing all my PCMCIA cards is a problem, at least if I want to work them flawlessly with my infra-red port installed. Interrupt and comms-port problems occur. As a consequence I had to do a lot of tuning and configuring on my PC and I encountered a very strange thing. Once PsiWin 2.1 was configured (this is done during installation) for a certain setup of comm ports, I could not make any changes in the ports' configuration without having to deinstall and reinstall PsiWin 2.1. This is because the complete comm-port setup in PsiWin is lost and it does not automatically re-detect the comm ports.

"So, in the case that your comm port setup has changed, PsiWin does not recognise any comm port and thus cannot establish a data connection. And, you cannot stop the software trying to connect, in order to make the changes in the PsiWin setting! This is an annoying shortcoming in the software."

Joost's email is too long to print in its entirety, but if you want to use an IR link it is too useful to leave out, so I have put it on this month's cover-mounted CD-ROM.

➤ Psion 5 to Outlook 98

Iris Crivon <ic@simonette.demon.co.uk> writes: "I have never been able to



▲ PsiWin 2.2 PROVIDES EXTENDED FUNCTIONALITY FOR SERIES 3 USERS



successfully synchronise the Psion 5 with Microsoft Outlook 98. The conversion engine often crashes completely.

"When it does work, I find that it writes back to the 5 so that I have multiple entries of everything. It will take ages to clear out my database. The only way I have found to have entries in Outlook 98 is to synchronise with Lotus Organiser 97 and import the agenda and database entries into Outlook 98.

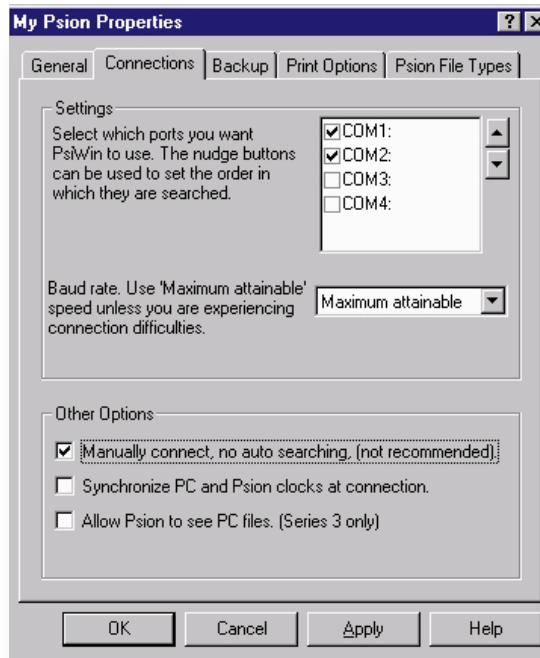
"Psion now bundles PsiWin 2.2 with new Psions. This may resolve some of the problems but I understand that it is not going to be available for a free download. For some time now on its web site, the company has been promising a service pack for PsiWin 2.1 but as yet there is no sign of it. I have had Psions since version 3 and have always found the PC software to be flaky. The 3, 3A and the 5 are great products and are very stable. But connectivity, well..."

➤ Psion 5 via PsiWin 2.1

Andrew Bovett <a_bovett@csi.com> has some advice: "In the November Hands On PDAs column you mentioned problems getting PsiWin to connect. I have a Psion Series 5 and in the past I have had problems getting it to connect via PsiWin 2.1. However, I have found a method which

always works for me. I have the 'Manually connect' option selected [Fig 2], as the automatic detection fouled up my modem connection (I have to share a port between modem and Psion as I'm short of serial ports). I discovered that if I tried to connect by using the 'My Psion' icon on the desktop, more often than not, it failed to work. But by using the PsiWin icon in the system tray to connect, it works every time. The procedure I follow is:

- 1 Make sure** that the remote link on the Psion is set to 'Cable' — it sometimes seems to get turned off, so it's worth checking first.
- 2 Right-click** on the PsiWin icon in the system tray (a straight horizontal line) and select 'Connect'. If this is successful, the icon will turn to a wavy line, indicating a successful connection. If not, check cables, serial ports, baud rates, etc.



▲ **FIG 2** ANDREW RECOMMENDS TURNING OFF THE AUTOSEARCH, EVEN THOUGH THIS IS NOT RECOMMENDED BY PSION

- 3 You can now open** the 'My Psion' icon on the desktop, or simply do a backup by right-clicking the 'My Psion' icon and selecting the 'Backup' option."

➤ FIFO disabled

David Oram <david@orams-place.freemove.co.uk> writes: "I too have had problems getting my Psion 5 and 3a to connect to my PC using all versions of PsiWin, up to and including v2.1, under Windows 95.

I have found that if I disable the FIFO buffer in my serial-port properties, then I can connect without any problems. I don't know why, but it seems to work!"



▲ **FIVE ALIVE:** IT IS POSSIBLE TO CONNECT THE SERIES 5 TO A PC

WHAT PRICE VERSION 2.2?

The concern that Iris Crivon expresses in her email (see "Psion 5 to Outlook 98", p261), namely that Psion will charge for version 2.2, is covered by this email that reader Steve Goddard forwarded to me, having previously received a reply from Psion's UK support team.

"Thanks for your reply," wrote Steve. "Am I to understand that having recently purchased a Series 5 (after the release of PsiWin 2.2) which came with PsiWin 2.0, I am expected to pay for an upgrade to the version you are supposed to be currently shipping with the Series 5? I understand that v2.2 is a commercial money-making project, given the extended functionality it has for existing Series 3 users. However, I do not understand why a download is not available to Series 5 buyers unfortunate enough to get older stock (bearing in mind that it is perfectly feasible to password-protect such web downloads, daily if necessary) by advising passwords to registered Series 5 buyers. This would not affect your revenues from Series 3 owners who are upgrading."

"From: UK Support <uk-support@psion.com>. PsiWin 2.2 is not available as a download as it is a chargeable product. In about ten days' time you'll be able to buy it from Dixons, Comet etc. as software only. At the moment you can only get it with a cable (which costs £20 more) for £50 [the software-only cost is about £30 — MW]. You can buy this version from Widget Software on 01438 818818."

I have to side with Steve on this one because I see version 2.2 as more of a bug fix than a significant upgrade. But then, I'm biased, because PsiWin gives me so much trouble in the first place that I see all new versions as potential bug-fixers.

PCW CONTACTS

Mark Whitehorn welcomes readers' correspondence and ideas for the Hands On PDAs column. Contact him via the PCW editorial office (address, p10) or email pda@pcw.co.uk.