

WOHL'S

COMDEX ALERT

AMY WOHL



WordPerfect PIM ... Newton ... Simon ... etc.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about this COMDEX is the size of the major vendors' booths; it's as if they are all on steroids!

It took me 15 minutes just to walk around the edge of the WordPerfect booth. I'd guess you could spend half a day there if you watched all the demos.

The one I choose to watch is the same product that beguiled Will Fastie. It's a new PIM, code-named CIA, which is part of WordPerfect's MainStreet consumer market product line (and therefore priced at a suggested list of \$149.95, although it won't be available until next year). Anything that catches the fancy of two cynical analysts on a crowded show floor has to be special and CIA is. It's based on some engine technology WordPerfect acquired when it bought Reference Software (the grammar people) last year.

It's unique because its interface is crystal clear, but its ability to build a complex, ongoing network of relationships and then utilize them intelligently in other CIA functions (calendar, address book, Rolodex, note and letter writing, filing) is neatly integrated. We think it's very high-powered for a consumer prod-

uct, so we suspect that it may make its way onto business desktops, too.

I promised you a review of some of the PDA action at COMDEX and there's certainly lots to talk about. Let's start with an important insight that Gaston Bastiaen of the Pie Division of Apple Computer brought up yesterday when we were talking about Newton, and which is confirmed by the announcement of IBM's Simon (which we'll discuss in a moment).

PDAs versus pencils

PDAs shouldn't be looked at as expensive replacements for a 49-cent notepad and a pencil (as one witty journalist has remarked). Rather, they are the beginning of a new kind of platform that will ultimately change the way people interact with and use information and may be as great a revolution, over time, as the personal computer.

Gaston mentioned Apple's relationships with its licensees, who will use the Newton operating system to build their own products, many of which won't look anything like a Newton. Enter IBM's Simon. It looks exactly like a cellular phone. That's because this Bell South/IBM collaboration is a cellular phone, with a PDA built in. Dialing functions (including all

the usual advanced ones like memory and redial, plus, of course, a built-in phone book) are only some of the things controlled through the LCD screen, which may be used via touch or pen.

Other functions include fax, e-mail, paging, an address book, a calendar and scheduler, a calculator and clock, and paperless note pad, and such functions as a to-do list. Simon can accept alphanumeric input through a regular typewriter keyboard (touch or tap keyed), handwriting (actually printing) recognition, or a unique six-character keypad which displays characters based on the most likely combinations and which changes after each character is input.

Simon Says

We were surprised at how well it anticipated us! Simon works in cellular (wireless) mode, but it can also accept an RJ-11 cable and work plugged into the phone system for phone and fax at lower rates. All its functions work in both modes. Simon has two paging options: a built-in cellular function, which accepts numeric pages and stores up to nine messages and an optional PCMCIA wireless pager which can receive and store alphanumeric pages.

All of this useful function is 18 ounces (just over one pound) and will be available for less than \$1000, nationwide, in December.

We also dashed by the Sharp booth and saw the Expert Pad (its version of the Newton), together with an interesting product from ETE, Inc. of San Diego, called the ETE Communicator. The unit is about the size of the Newton and weighs 6 ounces plus batteries. It fastens underneath and can provide wireless packet radio, an interface to the Rockwell NavCore Microtracker Global Positioning System, a hands-free cellular phone, and a data and fax modem.

The Communicator does not require the use of the single PCMCIA slot in the Sharp, leaving it free for a data or software card. We're also starting to see software for PDAs. We expect this category to multiply by leaps and bounds, since, for instance, Apple tells us there are more than 1700 Newton development kits out there.

We didn't get to see the Apple StarCore applications for Newton (we'll go back tomorrow), but we did see Ex Machina's PocketCall Intelligent Communications Assistant, which lets you communicate

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WILL'S

WINDOWS

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No rest for the weary if you seek Windows products

If you're like me, never liked remanufactured cartridges see if it might benefit you. last summer.

Plenty of PIM, PDA action

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and manage sessions with a variety of on-line hosts, including various commercial services, and Avalon's PresenterPad, which is designed to provide a portable teleprompter (or outline of your speech), for mobile speakers.

AT&T's EO is also beginning to benefit from the arrival of PDA applications software. We saw InkWriter from aha! software of Mountain View, CA, which permits you to write, draw, or with careful printing, have your sketches recognized, as well as Pensoft's Perspective Day Planner and Notable's Mobile Access (similar to Ex Machina). Sharpened Software was showing its In Order contact management software which offers a customizable desktop tools environment plus calendar and to-do list, access to customer files, and a place to record all types of information, including graphics. PDAs and personal communicators are at the beginning of their market. Abundant software is a requirement for their market to grow, so seeing the beginnings of that software arrive in the marketplace is an important and promising sign of what's to come.

We also had just enough time to look at the IBM Power Personal booth. If you'd like to know where the PowerPC chip is going, this is a good place to get some ideas. IBM has broad plans for multi-platform support and ambitious plans to support a much more intuitive interface with all that power. In the technology demonstration center, you can get an excellent peek at an agent whose face moves expressively as he talks, and look at the various voice recognition products IBM currently offers. You can also see an array of handwriting products, from state-of-the-market hand printing with the usual level of recognition to state-of-the-art handwriting recognition that does both dictionary and content analysis and several stops in between. Try them all. We need a better idea of what our choices are so we can figure out how to use what handwriting recognition does, rather than wish for what we'd like it to do.

That's it. I'll be here for two more days of looking; if you see me on the floor, stop me and we'll trade tips. Then a few months off and I'll see you in Atlanta.

(Amy Wohl is a consultant specializing in office information systems.)

Multimedia, mobile users will no longer compromise in '94

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It's less expensive to bundle it than get it as an add-in."

Handwriting recognition, a big trend last year, proved unready for prime time, admits Dan Bricklin, vice president of Slate Corp. "The one thing people caught on to with pens is electronic ink, and that's a new medium. It's control and free-form input, compared to old types of data-like letters and numbers." The result is "now people understand multimedia really is a big business."

For comedian Gallagher, who is helping IBM at its booth, the outcome of any COMDEX should be a "calm desk." Joseph Formichelli, vice president, visual products for the IBM Personal Computer Co., calls that trend "natural computing."

"Computers should be simple," easy

to buy, use and service, "they should be comfortable," designed to ease mind and body, "and we in the industry must be responsible," recycling materials and becoming better corporate citizens.

Steve Lair, vice president-marketing at Toshiba, agrees with Gallagher. "What's exciting isn't shipping." People want faster, lighter, simpler machines. And they'll no longer accept compromises. "Between now and the next COMDEX, customers will no longer give up anything when they go mobile."

This end to compromise extends to multimedia as well, says Bill Orlansky, channel manager in desktop imaging for Polaroid Corp. "People are seeing true color images on their monitors and want it in their presentations. We live in a visual world, and now PCs do, too."

Frank Fedele, a vice president at distributor Programmers' Paradise, sees a slow move from floppy disk distribution to CD distribution as applications keep getting bigger. But many distributors may be pushed to the wall by the trend of bundling applications. "That gives you a larger product to sell, but the larger vendors exert a lot of price pressure to sell them," he says.

CD-ROM means new products like Cookbook U.S.A. from J&D Distributing, with over 1 million recipes. Jim Krovontka says such products can add new value, letting cooks input the ingredients they have or those they're allergic to, and still finding hundreds of muffin recipes to choose from. "This will be the year when CD-ROM becomes a mass market," he predicts.

The divergence of processors, with Intel challenged on the desktop by the Digital Equipment Alpha and Motorola PowerPC, and in the hand by the Apple Newton and AT&T EO-Hobbit, has hit home to Jeffrey Miller, director of customer service and product management for NMB Technologies Inc. He doesn't understand how so many products can compete on such narrow margins and survive. "Volume is made up at the ex-

No rest for the COMDEX weary

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mas package is a great idea.

I don't think there is any question but that Windows is easier to use than DOS, but many users are still hesitant about all the components of the interface and even about the mouse. To help those folks out, consider training videos. One of the largest suppliers is ViaGrafix (H324 and S350).

Hot titles here include five on WordPerfect for Windows 6.0 and six on NetWare. ViaGrafix has titles for all the major Windows applications. Check them out.

Finally, American Small Business Computers (L194) is showing the Windows version of its popular DesignCAD program. I don't think many folks are as familiar with this company and DesignCAD as they might be with other products, but this new Windows version might change that.

Well, that's it for this year. Hope you

Wizard of

Two computer graphic icons introduced by 9500 series V input technology a variety of m

Ethernet

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