

PDA Phone is Not Better than Sex/Treo 600 Revisited/Teenagers, Golf Clubs, GPS

It was a dark and stormy night. I was talking to my son on my aging Kyocera 6035 PDA cell phone. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. His voice was clear and distinct. Suddenly, I heard the crackle of static during a lightning flash. I slowly slipped my phone into my pocket and grinned. It was a sign. Remembering that my phone had dropped off line while on the lowest basement level of the Convention Center parking garage nooklar fall out shelter the week before, I realized that my phone was now falling apart. I glanced at my contacts and calendar on the colorless screen of my dying phone, and knew that the static and the dropped call were brought to me for a reason.

For months my teenage children had avoided introducing me to their friends; they did not want to go to Schnucks, the mall or Home Depot with me, preferring instead the company of their friends. Or so they said. But as I thought back, I knew that the colorless screen on my phone must have influenced their decision to isolate me. And just maybe, if I got a new phone with a color screen, and a camera, I might be able to walk within 10 feet of them in public again.

And there were other reasons as well. My eyesight is not as good now as it was when I was younger, so a color screen would make it easier to see, and I would not be as likely to misread an appointment time. Not that I had misread one before. Forgotten a few, but hey, I've lost some brain cells over the years, so what do you expect? I reflected some more and realized that if I got a new phone, like a Palm One Treo 600, I could get a GPS navigation system, in case I got lost while traveling in foreign cities, such as LA. Or download MP3 tunes. Yeah, that's important to my practice!

You see, in order to plunk down \$350 for a gee whiz PDA phone when my current phone seems to do the job requires that I be able to justify, rationalize and fake some good excuses in order to be able to tell my wife, with a straight face, why I had to have this phone. Especially when her phone, which she has had for years, works perfectly and cost about \$50, or maybe it was free. I forget.

I have had some practice in this regard, which is how I landed my Miata and new golf clubs, when I already had a decent car and decent clubs, and it involves twisted logic, subterfuge, pleading and begging. Or failing that, simply hide the evidence and ask for forgiveness in the event that she notices the new purchase. I opted for the latter, which is what people who have been married for a long time do in an effort to avoid needless conflict.

So I did it. Bought the phone and promptly realized that my life had just gotten way more expensive. In order to have access to internet and email, which is the primary reason for wanting a PDA phone, Verizon requires that you subscribe to a data service along with your phone service. You have two options. At about \$30/month, you can download about 5MB of data. Or, you can have unlimited for \$50/month. Right now I am trying the lower priced service and will see how that works out. This is a lot different than the mobile web charges that I have enjoyed for the past 5 years, which also allowed

web access for about \$7/month. With mobile web, you used your phone minutes at whatever rate your plan allowed. Unfortunately, mobile web will not work with any of the PDA phones that Verizon sells, so the data charges are tacked on to your phone plan. That hurt.

My next shock occurred when the phone rang while I was driving with the top down on a sunny day. The color screen that I had paid so dearly for was “whited out” and I could see nothing. Nada. As this is a touch screen phone, it is disconcerting to be pressing on a blank and hoping you hit the “answer” button. But any color screen will blank out in bright sunlight, so this is not a drawback indigenous to the Treo. And it does a lot of stuff well.

One handed operation is easy. It has a navigation key and programmable buttons that go directly to your calendar, the internet or the phone. Contacts and calls made/received are easy to pull up as well. The Treo has a Qwerty keyboard, similar to a Blackberry, which is surprisingly easy to use for responding to emails. And I have found that I can do most anything without the need for the stylus. The phone is not much bigger than a deck of cards, and is much lighter than my old Kyocera. Reception is fine, the speakerphone works as well. The headset provided is not great, but that’s replaceable. Unlike the Kyocera, the Treo does not have voice dialing. But there is an easily accessible “favorite” list so I have not missed the voice feature.

Text messaging and picture mail works well. There is a built in camera, with a 640x480 resolution. No flash, so it will only work with decent lighting. There is software that will enhance resolution and provide digital zoom if that is important to you. Speaking of software, this is a Palm device that uses the Palm OS5.2 operating system, and there is a ton of software that can be downloaded into the phone. Plus, it has a memory card slot that can increase the memory dramatically. The battery is lithium ion with 5 hours talk time and so far, I have had no problems. Internet access is available, but no one surfs on a PDA phone. Takes too long and most sites don’t play well with small screens unless designed for that purpose. All attachments to emails will open, and spreadsheet, Word and WP documents will open as well.

Best of all, the phone synchs with Outlook, and on the fly, so I don’t have to synch from the cradle. Very handy when traveling. The system used by Verizon allows my email to be “pushed” from my server, so I don’t have to go and get it. Very similar to Blackberry, although not instantaneous. My system is set to push mail every 15 minutes, which works for me. My entire contact list and calendar are with me, and up to date, so from a professional standpoint, this phone rocks. Wait. I didn’t say that. Fortunately, my kids don’t read anything that has more writing than pictures, so I’m safe. For further info, do a Google search on Treo 600. There are people out there who apparently have lots of time, and they have really figured out lots of ways to use it. And wrote a book about it, “How to Do Everything with Your Treo 600.” I bought it (\$15/Amazon), and believe it or not, there really is a GPS navigator kit for the phone. Go to www.buygpsnow.com, and never get lost again. But it won’t cure your slice. I checked.

