

## **Personal Digital Assistants Revisited: What Lawyers Should do When the Office Server Does Not Accept the Sacrifice of a Runner or Secretary**

Read my lips. OK. Read my words. A Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) is a great tool for any lawyer who actually works for a living. It's even a great tool for lawyers who don't have to work for a living, such as real estate and transactional lawyers. And instead of plagiarizing the recommendations of others, I can say this now from personal experience.

Following my last article, in which I moaned and groaned about the failure of the cheapskates at the MBA to buy me a Personal Digital Assistant for review purposes, I bit the bullet and bought one. I needed to get into my office calendar and contacts list from home one Sunday to see what I was supposed to be doing the next week, but my office server would not allow a connection. Apparently, before leaving on Friday, I had failed to appease the server, which requires the weekly sacrifice of a secretary or runner, and it was angry.

As this was just the excuse I needed, I headed for Best Buy and picked up a Handspring Visor Deluxe for about \$250. Now, all of you smart lawyers out there will think for a second, and then realize that my trip to Best Buy could not possibly have solved my Sunday afternoon server problem. True, but when looking for an excuse (and a birthday present for moi), it doesn't take much. And because of my ranting and raving about how my practice would fall apart if I could not figure out where I was supposed to be on Monday, I was able to con (I mean convince) my wife into believing that this was not a stupid purchase. Of course after buying it I still could not figure out where I was supposed to be the next day, but hey, life's tough. And besides, I would be ready for the following Monday.

And believe it or not, I was and am. I am very happy with this purchase and you will be too. This product actually does what it is supposed to do, quickly, easily and with minimum hassle.

I had read a number of reviews on CNET, [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com), which is a great website to go to when looking for pricing and user experience. I had looked at all of the Palm models, the Handspring models, and the Windows CE models, and because of price and value, selected the Visor Deluxe from Handspring. This model runs the Palm operating system, for which hundreds of programs have been written. It has 8mb of memory and runs off two AA batteries, which last for several months. It comes with a cradle that plugs into the USB port on the back of the desktop at the office, and it has a one button synchronization system that actually works. You drop the device into the cradle, press the button, and in about 15 seconds, every contact, inbox email, to-do list and calendar entry from my Outlook shows up in the Visor. My contacts list has several thousand entries, so this is a big deal.

And unlike other synchronization programs which require one program to overwrite the other, the Visor doesn't force you to choose. It allows a mutual admiration society to exist, so that my entries will be added to the desktop, and vice-versa, even if there is a conflict. This allows me to reschedule if I schedule an event while out of the office and my secretary has set something for the same time.

Let's talk about software. I downloaded software that allows the Visor to pull Wordperfect and Word documents into the device for review or editing. Go to [www.dataviz.com](http://www.dataviz.com) to check this out. From [www.aportis.com](http://www.aportis.com), I downloaded software that allows my Visor to load the Federal Rules of Evidence and the Rules of Civil Procedure into the machine. Federal Bankruptcy rules, Rules of Criminal Procedure, the United States Constitution and other handy

tomes can all be downloaded, ready for instant access in the Visor. There are hundreds of books available, along with webpages and anything else you might need or want. Financial programs, spreadsheets, stock programs, games and reference materials are all available for download, and many are free.

The instant on/off feature means that there is no agonizing boot up period, so when Judge So and So starts suggesting dates for the next trial setting, you can immediately look months in advance and see if you have a conflict. I was in court recently and the judge began tossing out dates for a motion. For the first time in my career, I was actually able to pick the date I needed for a motion from my Visor calendar, while everyone else had to leave the courtroom and call the office and come back with dates. (I said smugly.) And if you have a federal practice, this is a Godsend. Think about the scheduling conferences that require knowledge of conflicts. Not that a conflict will change the judge's mind, but at least you can advise the court that you have a trial or vacation, and when the laughter stops and the court schedules into your conflict anyway, you know immediately that you will be explaining to your wife and kids why the trip you have planned for 2 years will have to be rescheduled. (Ok Robert, I realize that you can accomplish the same thing with a paper calendar, but explain to me again how I get several thousand phone numbers and addresses from the Rolodex or computer into my daytimer. . . .)

Unlike the Palm, the Visor can be upgraded. It can serve as a pager, a cell phone (read about this feature at [www.larrysworld.com](http://www.larrysworld.com)) and with the addition of a modem, it will allow internet access. It will convert to a digital camera and I'm sure that it will convert to a microwave oven if we wait long enough. For my purposes, though, it does what I want it to do. It instantly provides me with access to my calendar, my office to-do list, and my phone contacts when I am away from the office. It is lightweight, fits into a jacket pocket and is easy to operate. Granted, it's in black and white, but do you really need to see your addresses in burnt fuchia? This is a no brainer for any lawyer who has information on a desktop that the lawyer would like to have when away from the office.

#### Technoweenie Q&A

Q. Will a PDA make a lawyer cool, with it and sort of like a doctor?

A. No. Even if you wear it on your belt like a pager, it will not allow you to charge \$700 for reading back your transcribed dictation during a one hour deposition involving your client.