

Illustration: Sam Williams ([www.magictorch.com](http://www.magictorch.com))



# PDA SUPERGUIDE

Discover how to switch on to mobile computing as Rob Buckley presents the ultimate guide to using a PDA with your Mac

In the age of the notebook, why would you need anything other than an iBook or PowerBook to be wired wherever you go? It's a good question, but ever since Apple released its first portable machine – which many professional powerlifters still use today as an alternative to weights – it's been clear that laptops simply make it easier, not easy, to take files and programs with you wherever you go.

Fortunately, there is an alternative: the Personal Digital Assistant (or PDA). Roughly the size of the palm of your hand, a PDA has a screen, memory and the ability to synchronise data with a computer. Even though PDAs are nowhere near as powerful as a laptop, they can give you access to almost all your information – in particular, your calendar and your address book – without giving you a hernia.

There's no start-up time to worry about with PDAs, you can access any of your applications in a couple of seconds, you can fit one into your pocket and carry it with you wherever you go, you can take it out from your pocket without anyone noticing you have an expensive and nickable electronic device with you, and if you drop it your chances of a heart attack are substantially reduced in relation to the inevitable sharp stabbing pains in the chest you'll get when a PowerBook topples to its doom.

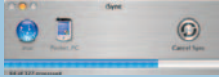
Unfortunately, if you do begin the journey down the path to true PDA enlightenment, you're going to have to get used to the phrase, "Does it work with a Mac?" along the way. And if you pick the wrong model, you're going to be as cool as Bill Gates in a woollen sweater at a roller disco. So tread wisely and read on.

## The smart option?

As always, your first questions should be: "Do I really need this? What am I going to use it for?" If all you want to do is take your calendars and ►

## LIFE-SAVING SOFTWARE

Essential utilities for PDA owners



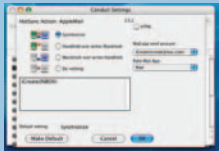
### THE MISSING SYNC FOR POCKET

PC/Clie/Palm OS

Cost: \$39.95

URL: [www.markspace.com](http://www.markspace.com)

PDA users with Macs come off badly compared with those with Windows. Mark/Space's Missing Sync makes it possible to sync your Mac with Pocket PCs or Clies.



### APPLE MAIL CONDUIT

Licence: Donationware

URL: [www.queuesoft.jp/index-e.html](http://www.queuesoft.jp/index-e.html)

A nice Japanese man has developed lots of conduits to fill in the gaps Palm has left in its Mac syncing. Of main interest is this one which syncs Mail with the Palm mail programs.



### MAL CONDUIT

Licence: Freeware

URL: [www.mazipit.com/malconduit-103.dmg](http://www.mazipit.com/malconduit-103.dmg)

Many news sites let PDA users access their stories via AvantGo. The Palm OS conduit hasn't been updated since OS 9, but this open source version does the job for OS X.

## Once someone starts using a PDA, they often wonder how they lived without one. The more you learn about your PDA the more you can get out of it

contacts with you, and you can afford it, buy an iPod. They're cool, can store lots of music and can display all your information and a little bit more using iSync or some third-party software.

If you want to be able to alter or add to that information, however, you're going to have to look for something more. The next step up from the iPod is a 'smartphone'. These are the same as regular phones, but with some computer-like programs - usually email, a calendar, a Web browser, and an image viewer. Importantly, you can make changes to calendars and contacts on your phone and they'll be updated on your Mac the next time you synchronise them. Best of all, you can download and install additional programs from a Mac or PC, including some truly old Mac favourites such as Opera, RealPlayer and Acrobat Reader.

A smartphone may be enough for you and is a good alternative to a PDA. Even if you have a PDA as well, you might not want to take two devices with you all the time and having some of your data with you is better than none. Nevertheless, they do have quite a few failings. Since they're smaller than PDAs, they have smaller screens so it's harder to read things on a smartphone than it is with a PDA. Most have few keys to enter data with, so if you think writing text messages on a phone is hard enough, wait until you've tried composing an email on one.

The final area where smartphones fall down in comparison to PDAs is in software and synchronisation. Since smartphones have only recently appeared on the market, there



Although Pocket PCs don't come with Mac-compatible software, third party developers like Mar/Space make software to plug the void

are relatively few people with each variety of phone. And because there are even fewer people willing to pay for new software, there aren't many programs out there. Many types of application would be unusable on the average smartphone anyway (who would want to edit a spreadsheet on a 160-pixel wide screen?).

More important is the issue of synchronisation. While smartphones will happily synchronise contact and calendar information with Address Book and iCal, very few of them will synchronise that information with Entourage or Now Contact, for example. Other information won't be synchronised at all. So, if you do upload a Word document onto your smartphone, by some miracle find a piece of software to open it and then don't go blind from actually trying to read it, you'll still have to manually upload it onto your Mac again and then synchronise any changes you've made with the original document (if that's even possible).

It's the amount of software and the ability to synchronise information that really makes a PDA a worthwhile purchase. PDAs have access to thousands of programs written especially for them, including games, business applications, databases, spreadsheets, word processors, dictionaries, shopping list programs, fitness trainers, language tutors, Web browsers, wine advisors (!), guidebooks, maps, route planners and restaurant guides. Many can exchange information with Mac programs automatically during synchronisation and, when they don't have Internet connections of their own, even use your Mac's to download data.

## Picking a PDA

If you decide on a PDA rather than one of its less powerful cousins, it's time to pick an Operating System. While generally Macs use Mac OS X and PCs use Windows, PDAs divide into those that run the Palm OS and those that use the Pocket PC OS.

PDAs that use the Palm OS are the more obvious choice for most Mac users since they all come with software for Mac synchronisation, with the exception of Sony's Clie devices. Pocket PCs don't, although you can buy extra software for Mac syncing. There are no really cheap Pocket PCs. HP's iPaq Pocket PC H1930 is probably the cheapest at £189 and most are heavier and bulkier than their Palm brethren.

So is there any reason for a Mac user to buy a Pocket PC? The simple answer for most consumers is, "No, not really". But for business users and power geeks, Pocket PCs may be more appealing, even if Mac support is limited. The Pocket PC OS is really a cut-down version of Windows, so developers find it a lot easier to rewrite a Windows program slightly for Pocket PCs than to completely rewrite it for Palm OS. As a result, there are many business-level applications being developed for Pocket PCs that are not making it through to the Palm OS.

## Step-by-step PDA Syncing your PDA with your iApps



### 1. Get the conduit

First, you need to get the iSync conduit from Apple and install it. You can download it from [www.apple.com/iSync/download](http://www.apple.com/iSync/download)



### 2. Enable the conduit

Once you've installed the conduit, enable it using HotSync manager. Make sure it hasn't disabled any of your existing conduits (except the ones from Palm)!



### 3. Configure iSync

Use iSync to configure what will sync with your PDA. Next time you HotSync, iSync will run and synchronise your PDA with your Mac and other devices.





## What if Apple made...

...a PDA? Oh wait. It did. In fact, Apple invented the PDA. The Newton did everything a conventional PDA could do and more. It had proper handwriting recognition. You could plug in a modem and make it a fax. It was insanely great, even though it cost \$950, weighed as much as a brick and wouldn't fit in anyone's pocket except Doctor Who's. Such is its continuing greatness that there are still Newton user groups.

But Steve Jobs killed it. And even though there's been some internal development, he's proud that Apple has not released a new Newton. With Sony and Toshiba leaving the PDA market and those remaining doing poorly, Jobs believes PDAs are expensive toys that not many people want.

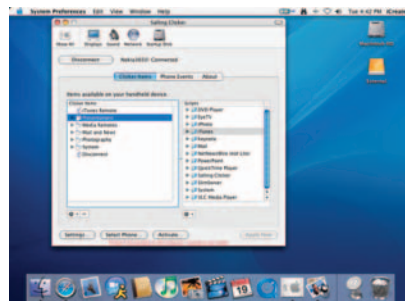
This attitude has caused much wailing and gnashing of teeth among the faithful. The great hope has been that Apple, who "ignited the personal computer revolution in the 1970s and reinvented the personal computer in the 1980s with the Macintosh", would release a PDA for the new millennium that everyone would want to own. Something like OS X on a handheld would make plenty of people drool. But it's not going to happen as long as Steve Jobs is at the helm. Sorry.

## Step-by-step PDA Control your Mac via Bluetooth



### 1. Get Salling Clicker

Use your smartphone or Palm as a remote control for your Mac (provided they have Bluetooth). Get a copy of Salling Clicker from <http://homepage.mac.com/jonassalling/Shareware/Clicker/Index.html> and install it on both devices.



### 2. Activate it and connect

Open up the System Preferences and select the Salling Clicker pane. That will start the program running and allow you to connect to your device. It's as simple as that!



### 3. Pick some events

Now you can control your Mac with your PDA or smartphone, but you can also get your Mac to respond to events around you: pause iTunes automatically whenever the phone rings, or whenever you're away from your Mac.

## Syncing isn't as easy as it looks and you can quite often end up with duplicate or deleted contacts

Internet connection) all have Mac conduits. You can even get a conduit for downloading Radio Times listings from the Internet to your PDA: the Radio Times application on your handheld can control your TV and satellite box using infra-red signals, too - try doing that with a PowerBook!

### That syncing feeling

Synchronisation between handheld and Mac needn't stop with just one computer. You can use the synchronisation software to unify data on different Macs using a PDA. To sync the data on both Macs, simply connect the PDA to them in turn and run the syncing software a few times. Since PDAs all come with software that works with Windows, you can, in theory, also synchronise data between Windows and Mac.

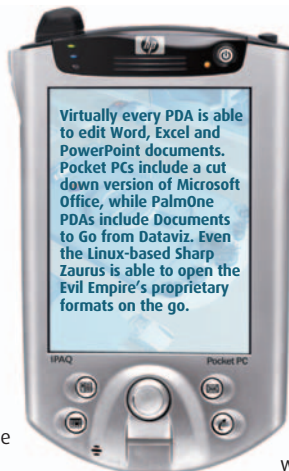
Be careful, however. Before you do anything, make backups. As anyone who's used iSync can testify, syncing isn't as easy as it looks and you can quite often end up with duplicate or deleted contacts. Take a look at the fields available in different pieces of address book software and you'll notice that the information you can store about people in Entourage is quite different from what you can store in Outlook for Windows and so on. The same is true for the PDA as well. So the developers of synchronisation conduits have to make a choice: don't



As with many things, Amazon.co.uk is a great place to pick up PDAs at bargain prices and has some older models going for a song

synchronise all the information, or bung anything left over in custom and notes fields.

This isn't much of a problem when you're only syncing one machine with a PDA or you stick to the same software on all your machines. But as soon as you start mixing software, you're going to end up cross-pollinating your immaculate records in Address Book with useless detritus from other programs (Now Contact is particularly guilty of inserting "height of contact's third child when he was seven" and other pointless make-the-sale! data into Notes fields). Be prepared for an initial period of checking and de-duplication when you start mixing software on different machines and keep a watchful eye on what happens in subsequent syncs. But with caution, you should be able to get a compromise data format that works on all machines and all software.



Once you've picked Pocket PC or Palm OS, look at both current and discontinued models to see which ones have the features you need and the aesthetic you want (some look less than cool, but you may be willing to grin and bear the mockery of your friends and random strangers).

### Finding a bargain

When PDAs are upgraded, there's not usually much added beyond extra memory or slightly faster processors, so older models may well meet your needs just as well. Older models of PDAs also linger with resellers for far longer than older Macs and PCs. The Treo 90, for example, remains the smallest and lightest Palm PDA yet made; it is the only one available for under £300 that uses a keyboard rather than handwriting recognition for input; it can use a Bluetooth SD card to connect to mobile phones; and it was discontinued a year ago. Yet you can still buy it on Amazon for £137. So take a look at online stores to see if some of the now-discontinued models are still available and have the features you want, but at a cheaper price.

Be sure, however, to pay very careful attention to the features you'd be losing by going for a cheaper or discontinued model. A model with an old Motorola chip will be too slow to play music or videos, for instance.

The planning over, you're now free to go out and buy a PDA. Once people start using PDAs, they often wonder how they lived without them. The more you learn about them, the more you can get out of them, as you add software and make them suit your lifestyle and work. For a relatively small outlay, you can have an A-Z, a portable computer, your diary, your photo album, a travel guide, a TV listings magazine, a remote control and a music player all in one pocket. Now that's magic, isn't it? ■