WIRELESS COMPUTING

Palm unveils 'BlackBerry killer'

PALM WILL UNVEIL this week its first handheld device with built-in wireless carrier support that provides access to personal and corporate e-mail accounts.

A potential threat to the BlackBerry device, the new i705 will have to provide wider and deeper support for corporate applications to be competitive with similar devices such as the Compaq iPaq, said industry observers.

The new system will use the Cingular Wireless Mobitex packet data network to push e-mail out to devices without requiring user intervention.

The i705, priced at $449, will ship before the end of the month with a personal e-mail client, Palm MultiMail Deluxe Desktop and Link, as well as an e-mail Wizard utility for installation of as many as six different Internet e-mail accounts.

The corporate e-mail solution for Microsoft Exchange Outlook and Domino Lotus Notes server, called the Palm Wireless Messaging Solution, will be available this summer; a beta test is under way now. The device also supports AOL's Instant Messenger service and allows users to access the same account they have on their desktop.

One industry analyst applauded the new Palm i705 but said the device will eventually have to provide more than just access to e-mail.

"Potentially, this is a RIM BlackBerry killer but wireless is still a subset of mobile users. Most of the sales for Pocket PC are based on accessing [cor-
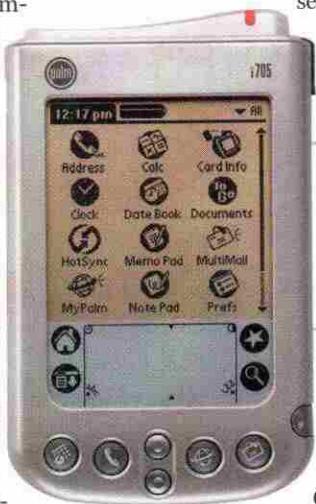
PALM'S i705: The $499 unit has a built-in antenna for always-on access to e-mail via Cingular.

porate] applications not wireless," said Phil Redman, an analyst at Gartner, based in Stamford, Conn.

Although granting that wireless may be a niche, one Palm executive said that wireless usage is growing rapidly.

"Communications are an expanding piece of the pie. Fifty percent of the handheld market will want wireless [support] by 2005," said Scott Lincke, director of wireless products at Palm in Santa Clara, Calif.

The Mobitex network for wireless access, also used by Research in Motion (RIM) will be priced at $19.99 for 100KB of data or $39.99 for unlimited access to data. It includes Web browsing and AOL's Instant Messenger. Other than wireless, Palm executives also promise tighter integration with corporate networks later this year.

For IT departments that want to load a standard image on all corporate handhelds, the Palm Wireless Messaging Solution gives IT managers the ability to flash applications, OS upgrades, and the e-mail client onto the handhelds using either a Secure Digital expansion card or through a cradle synchronization process for activation and provisioning of corporate solutions.

A single server can support both Exchange and Domino solutions and includes a filtering utility to designate by size, name, or keywords which corporate e-mails a user wants pushed out to the handheld. The server edition, which can support as many as 1,000 users, has a base price of $2,499 for 25 client licenses. Additional client licenses are $45 per seat.

— *Ephraim Schwartz*

Improving the view to corporate portals

MARTIN LA MONICA

It's no mystery why most enterprises are hard at work on new portal applications, and nearly every major software vendor is gravitating to the portal idea. It's because, despite years of IT investment, information workers can actually become less effective as data overload clouds their view of operations and thwarts quick access to the right information and people in the organization.

Giving end-users a consolidated view into a number of applications helps sort out difficult issues around training and data presentation. But as portals become the de facto entry into corporate resources, viewing portals as simply a point of integration on users' desktops won't be enough.

Portals need to be tied to content management systems and be layered with functionality, notably search and business intelligence, to improve their effectiveness. Our lead news story this week by Michael Vizard and Cathleen Moore explains the reasons for this convergence of technologies and describes the competition around portals. This integration of functionality will accelerate as software vendors support common Web services standards and enterprises use more XML-tagged data in critical systems.

Without these added services, which help businesses target portals to specific constituencies, portals will ultimately just expose more corporate data without introducing any more order.

Of course, giving freedom to end-users does come with its trappings. Our story "Carriers create firewall bypass" by Ephraim Schwartz and Brian Fonseca (see page 24) sheds light on a method to get wireless access through the back door — in this case, through corporate firewalls.

For both wireless connectivity and more functional portals, end-users will be pushing IT to crack open the door into systems a little wider.

Are portals part of your corporate strategy? Write to me at martin_lamonica@infoworld.com.