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**My PDA, Myself**

**By Donna Schwartz Mills**

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I used to be one of those people who kept everything in their head. I prided myself on my ability to memorize phone numbers and birthdays, and knew my schedule without writing anything in a calendar.

Then I became a mom.

I am now one of the most forgetful people on the planet. I don't know if it's due to the fact that I am no longer responsible for just myself (keeping track of my schedule, my daughter's schedule, the school's schedule, the play dates, the after school lessons and more)... or if I lost brain cells during pregnancy ... but my short term memory has turned to mush. These days, I need to write everything down... more than ever, now that I have a business of my own.

I made but one resolution last year: To do a better job of tracking my family's schedule and recording my business expenses. I started out great – I bought a spanking new organizer with custom pages and pouches for receipts, stamps and business cards. I kept a schedule for me and my family, wrote down all my mileage (a must for tax purposes!) and tracked my biz expenses...

...for about two months. The book was too big to fit in my bag, it was heavy to carry – and I began leaving it at home more often than not, which kind of defeated the purpose of having an organizer at all. Then, I lost it and all the

information it contained.

So I bought another one. This time, I decided to go the deluxe route. I headed to my local Franklin Covey store and purchased a beautiful butternut leather book and pretty organizer pages, which included Stephen Covey's system on becoming more effective. The whole package cost me about \$100 – I figured if I invested this much into it, I would be less apt to lose it.

I started writing down goals and tracking all of my business tasks, and was feeling quite on top of things...

...for about two months. Once again, the biggest obstacle to using the system was that it was too bulky and heavy to carry with me everywhere. I looked with envy at friends who had invested in electronic PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) organizers – small, light-weight devices that sync up with your computer and fit easily into a purse. That, I thought, would be a solution – if only they were not so expensive.

Well, PDA's are not so expensive any longer. With the entry-level Palm model retailing at just \$99, and Handspring Visors available at similar cost, almost everyone can afford to carry one now.

### What to Look for in a PDA

There is a dizzying array of PDA models with various features, so deciding which one you buy can be a confusing process. Since a PDA is really just a small, hand-held computer, your buying decision should be based on some of the same considerations you make when purchasing a desktop system:

1. RAM
2. Speed
3. Expandability
4. Price

There are two major competing operating systems in the PDA world. The most popular uses the system developed by Palm – these include the Handspring Visor, the Sony Clie and of course, the Palm Pilot. The other major OS is called PocketPC – this is a Windows-based environment developed by

Microsoft to compete with Palm. It is somewhat easier to exchange information between PocketPC handhelds and Windows based software – but at a price. PocketPC requires more system resources – the popular Compaq iPaq H3650 features a minimum of 32 MB of RAM, which makes these devices slightly heavier and more expensive than the ones that run the Palm OS.

The folks at ZDNet have created a guide to help you decide which PDA models are best for you. While you're there, you can view a list of the most popular models and user reviews and even shop online for the best prices:

<http://www.zdnet.com/products/stories/reviews/0,4161,2581305,00.html>

### **Using Your New PDA**

All PDA models come bundled with the two most important organizing functions: Address book and Calendar. If you use Microsoft Outlook on your desktop computer, you can import all of your current entries with ease via your new handheld's syncing function.

Creating new entries is also a cinch. You have the option of tapping an on–screen keyboard with your stylus or "writing" the text using your device's built–in handwriting function (called "Graffiti" on Palm based systems). Graffiti takes a little bit of getting used to, but it's pretty easy to master. Most users tend to fluctuate between the two entry systems.

There are thousands of third–party software programs that you can download into your new PDA – many of them are free. My personal favorite is AvantGo, which allows me to carry the movie listings from every theater in my local area. These update automatically whenever I sync my handheld to my desktop.

Each of the major PDA manufacturers carries software links. You'll also find much to choose from at these sites:

<http://www.palmgear.com>

<http://www.handango.com/>

<http://www.pilotzone.com/>

<http://www.zdnet.com/downloads/>

<http://www.memoware.com/>

Bear in mind that you are limited by the amount of RAM included in your device. If you find yourself running out, you should look into adding a new memory module.

Technology writer Mark Kellner offers the following advice on getting along with your new PDA:

1. Synchronize and backup at least once per day.
2. Watch your batteries. The more inexpensive models tend to use AAA-sized batteries – make sure you have a steady supply.
3. Protect your device with a case. Chances are, your new PDA came with a catalog of third party vendors offering a wide variety of products. Check them out.
4. Get a screen protector. These are thin sheets of plastic that use static to adhere to the screen.

I received my new Handspring Visor as a Christmas gift and I love it. Because it fits right into my handbag without

adding much weight, it is as constant a companion as my wallet and cellular phone. I'm trying out some expense tracking and vehicle expense software, as well as a diet and exercise log and feel good about my prospects of meeting this year's resolutions... I'll let you know in a couple of months!

Donna Schwartz Mills writes about the specific needs of work at home parents at her website, The ParentPreneur Club "For Parents Who Want Choices, Not Office Politics." The latest news, tips, and tools you need to help grow your homebased business while raising a family. Subscribe to our weekly newsletter:

## **Using The Right PDA**

**By Catherine Franz**

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When we think of writing it triggers many thoughts and visions depending on our framing. It could trigger a lone man with a full astray, unshaven, staring at an old plunking typewriter with white blank crisp paper waiting in anticipation for his words.

## My PDA, Myself

If a mother or younger, it could conjure up an image of a 30-something woman typing away on a keyboard with an apron on, in between making formulas or getting ready for work, still dark outside. Pounding on the keys because the flow is there, just as the light from the window begins to change, trying to get as much onto the page before the kids need her attention.

If you grew up in a Catholic school in the 50s, writing could mean perfect penmanship and a rap on the knuckles if you didn't.

The times have changed, thank goodness, and now children grow up with memories of learning to cluster and freewrite. To allow whatever needs to flow appear onto the page. There are more books than ever on creativity, and how to play and embrace the craft new everyday. It is a freeing time for writers.

Yet, three principles prevail no matter what your association to the meaning of writer appears. They are PDA, for short. No, not the PDA you carry around in your pocket. But the PDA a writer needs to carry around in the heart.

P=patience  
D=discipline  
A=action

The patience to allow our writing to mature with practice. To push just enough to keep us uncomfortable yet still allow us to keep trying.

The discipline to sit still long enough to get it started and completed. The discipline to keep picking up the pen, putting another sheet of paper in the printer, or buying new keyboards because the last one certain keys just plain gave out.

Action to keep the vision and dream alive for one more time, one more word, one more story, one more meaning.

Remember, the next time you want to write more or write better. Don't pull out your PDA from your pocket, but pull out the ones that really count from your heart. The ones that truly affect your ass(ets), patience, discipline, and creative action.

Catherine Franz is a Marketing & Writing Coach, niches, product development, Internet marketing, nonfiction writing and training. Articles: <http://www.abundancecenter.com> blog: <http://abundance.blogs.com>



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