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Phone Update

So, is Windows Mobile really better? Is the Treo 680 worth getting? Any update on the 700p or 750v? What about other devices (maybe the Sony Ericsson P990i or the Nokia E62)? Read on, and all your device questions will be answered.

We thought the **Palm Sprint Treo 700wx** might be the phone that would get us to switch from Palm OS to Windows Mobile. It isn't. The 700wx is not stable, takes a lot more effort to use, gets terrible reception, and has the worst battery life of any phone we've ever used (5-7 hours for power users). It has some really nice features (Pocket Word, easy syncing, easy file system navigation), but they don't come close to making up for the fact that the Windows Mobile OS itself isn't nearly as good as the Palm OS--either in terms of ease of use or how it interacts with the hardware (battery life, stability, reception).

Of more interest is the **Treo 680**. The 680 runs on a new version of Palm OS, which fixes some of the major issues inherent to the 700p. It comes through Cingular which means you can use it in Europe and China. Delivery has been delayed due to a snafu, but should be available mid-December.

The 680 comes in multiple colors, will cost \$199 with a new Cingular plan (\$399 unlocked), and ships with a 1GB memory card (only a \$19 value, but what a smart thing to include). It has a weaker camera, but that's probably still ok for business users. Reception seems to be improved over the 700p, but it is hard to tell because they are on different networks (GSM vs. CDMA). The phone issues in the 700p also seem to be mostly fixed (delays when dialing, similar to the original issues with the 600). The battery life is still not it's strong suit. The 650 still manages more talk-time.

The **Treo 750v** should likely be avoided. It has all the device limitations of the 700p, with all the drawbacks of the 700wx. Just say no. We also recommend against the 700p, unless there is no way to avoid getting one (stick to the 650).

The **SonyEricsson P990i**, at \$799, is to be avoided. It isn't a very good device and doesn't work well with the operating system (Symbian). Also Good does not work with the P990i.

The **Nokia E62** (Cingular, \$249) is very nice phone. Although it is a bit wider than the Treos, it is actually thinner and lighter, and goes longer between charges. It seems to get better reception than the either the Treo 650 or 680. It

also works with Good. It isn't quite as versatile as the 680 or 700p (Palm OS is hard to beat for ease of use), but it is good enough for business purposes, is simple, and coupled with the reception and battery life, we find it hard not to recommend. This is a nice phone.

The **Motorola Q** is a nice looking device (thinner and lighter than the Treos), but it lacks many features that the Palms all have (touchscreen or navigation being the most integral). It is also based on Windows Mobile, which is to say it is bad. Although Good works on the Q, Iteon doesn't recommend it.

Other Notes on Phone Technology

Good Technology was recently acquired by **Motorola**. Iteon is hoping this will be a good thing. While Good's mail is the only good product for Exchange mail (Blackberry is not so good), Good's sales and support have both been not so good lately, with huge pricing fluctuations, an irritating invoicing/renewal process, and first-line support outsourced to India (not a good idea). Good and Motorola have assured us that everything will be good, but time will tell whether this is a good move or less than good for Good users.

4GB SD Cards (for Treos) are now available for about \$90. 1GB cards are \$20, and 2GB cards are about \$45. All are easily available, 1GB and 2GB are even at Target.

Google Maps is cool. I know that there are other "get-me-to-where-I'm-going" applications, but Google Maps is great. It really needs a fast Internet connection (like EVDO or EDGE), but if you have a 700p or a 680 and you try Google, it will become indispensable.

Plasma TVs Quick Note

Prices on plasmas have fallen significantly, but beware--the prices are often too good to be true. When shopping for a Plasma TV, there are a few easy factors to consider (size, brightness, contrast), but with these lower cost Plasmas it is really important to look at one additional factor: **Upconversion**.

Upconversion is how an HDTV (High Definition TV) processes the non-HD signals (most TV sources). It would be great if everything were in HD, but most TV isn't there yet, and won't be for quite a while. Likewise, any old VCR tapes, and older DVDs don't even approach high-def. If you get a TV with a low-end upconverter, you'll end up with what looks like lousy reception for most of what you watch.

So how do you tell if that \$1999 52" HD Plasma has a good upconverter, especially when all the Demo's that run in the showrooms are HD? A \$1999 52" HD Plasma likely has a cheap one (don't buy it). You can ask the sales person, but you risk both being upsold, and that the sales person doesn't know what they're talking about. Sometimes, you may be able to get someone to show you a regular signal (or you

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could even bring in a VCR tape that looks good on your old TV), but they may not let you do this. You can also look on the Internet for reviews of the various TVs you see at a showroom. Don't assume, though, that a \$3,500 Sony has better upconversion than \$2999 LG. Generally higher price will give you better upconversion, but brand and price are not especially indicative--you need to check the exact model. Also be very careful of the sales guy that tells you one letter in the model will save you \$500. It is likely that the \$500 savings will come at the price of the upconverter.

Flat Panel LCD TVs & 19-22" Monitors

Prices on Flat Panel LCDs have fallen a lot in the last 3-4 months. Very high quality Flat Panel LCD TVs (especially 37" and 42" models) are competing both with plasmas and rear projection DLP computer on both price and quality.

Likewise, if you are purchasing a new computer or are looking for the latest and best in monitors, there are quite a few brands of 20", 21", and 22" monitors that are in the \$300-\$600 range. 19" monitors have similarly fallen, with excellent 19" models in the \$250-\$300 range.

A few tips on buying LCDs: Name brands are often best. Oddly, this doesn't mean that Sony is necessarily the ticket--(Sharp, LG, and Samsung have some of the best models available. Also, quality can vary significantly by model. While there may be a few bargains to be had, here's what to look out for:

- Contrast Ratio and Brightness
- How it looks and how bright it is
- Upconversion (for HD LCD TVs)
- Resolution

As always with any big screen TV, if you want dark blacks and fast action (if Football is your life), you probably want a plasma. If brightness will be an issue, get a Plasma. If you want to go above 42", probably think plasma.

Also, while flat panels are all the rage, DLP quality has come up quite significantly, and the prices are significantly lower than prices for flat panels.

Airplanes and Computers

Air Canada now has 3-prong AC power (how do they ground it?) on many of their planes--in every seat. Some American Airlines planes have power, too, but not many and mostly in business class only on certain routes. Other airlines have experimented with it on a few routes, but mostly just in first and business. Air Canada seems to have figured out a way to do it cheaply. While Internet is a nice feature, without power, that flight to JFK gets pretty unproductive after about 2 1/2 hours (ditto your sanity level when the kids' Shrek runs out of battery over Wyoming).

Progress on WiFi and cell phone repeaters on planes may be dead for the time being. Boeing's partner in WiFi/Internet and cell delivery has pulled out, and most airlines are coming to the conclusion that they can't make additional profits from additional features in this market. Like in-air meals, WiFi and cell service in the air are taking a step back. Another company may pick up the ball, but it will be a while before any of us see the results.

Vista, Spyware or Snake Oil, Core Duo

Vista. The new version of Microsoft Vista was due out in late November. It likely won't really be available until late January or February. This will likely have a chilling effect on Christmas PC sales at Christmas. Look for bargains just before and just after Christmas. Iteon doesn't recommend going to Vista for at least 4-6 months anyway. While there are a few Mac features that are finally making their way to Windows, right now the flaws far outnumber the benefits.

Spyware or Snake Oil. Right now, there is no software that can either reliably detect spyware or remove it. There are quite a few packages that add a huge irritation factor, and do a little bit to protect your computer, but none are currently adequate.

A few products are starting to mature to a point that they may be worth installing (cost is not the factor to consider here--it is whether they work without interrupting your work). It may be that at least one is going to be worth installing sometime in the next 4-8 months. It is worth noting that most hacks of the Windows OS have been cleaned and that the best defense is to just have all the Microsoft updates installed (call Iteon if you are not sure you're getting updated). Also, Vista will likely make Spyware detection tools obsolete just as they are getting good enough to use.

For now--keep anti-virus software and Windows updates (Microsoft Update) current.

New Intel Core Duo chips. (If you don't consider yourself at least a little geeky, you may want to skip this section!) So how is the Intel Core 2 Duo different from the Intel Pentium D (especially since the Core 2 Duo is operates at 2.7 GHz while the Pentium D runs at 3.73 GHz)? Both have 2 core processors in one chip that fits into a standard motherboard (no Xeon motherboard required for either).

In a nutshell, the Core 2 Duo is just a better chip. It operates at a slower frequency, but because of a bunch of improvements in the design of the chip, it runs significantly faster. Here's what makes it faster:

- 4MB cache (instead of 2 x 2MB caches)
- More transistors
- Better logic design
- 4x266MHz channels between the processor and the RAM, instead of 2x400MHz
- Runs cooler and uses less energy

The last two are more significant than they seem.

Because there are 4 channels going to the RAM and more in aggregate, the chip can take in more and spit out data faster.

The heat is even easier to understand. Because the Core 2 Duo chips are cooler and use less electricity, Intel can put more processors into a single form factor. The QUAD Core Duo will be out soon, and it is likely that a 6-way chip will follow. This will cause PC, laptop, and sm/med server prices to fall significantly and with a significant increase in speed.

Iteon News

Happy Holidays from Everyone at Iteon!

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