

## Technology: Make space for the little ones

By Roger Bray

Published: October 9 2006 14:43 | Last updated: October 9 2006 14:43

The option of travelling light has never appeared so desirable. If there is one lesson to be learnt from the sudden security clampdown that followed this summer's alleged plot to blow up transatlantic airliners, it is to expect the unexpected.

While current bag restrictions for passengers embarking at UK airports do not preclude the carrying of full-size laptops, using the smallest computers available will free space for other items. Better still, be prepared to ditch the laptop altogether and use a handheld device, in conjunction with a virtual keyboard perhaps. Or take a memory stick or portable smart drive and use someone else's computer when you arrive.

Research suggests that airline passengers like to use small devices such as the seemingly ubiquitous BlackBerry.

A recent survey commissioned by OnAir, the Geneva-based Airbus-SITA joint venture set up to provide passengers with airborne communications, found that 65 per cent of BlackBerry and Palm Treo users would turn their devices on during flights if the safety authorities allowed them to, 94 per cent would take calls and check e-mail and 82 per cent would make calls and send e-mail messages.

For travellers needing to take laptops but anxious to cut bulk and weight, Sony recently launched a new "ultra portable", the Vaio TX-3, which has an 28.2cm screen and weighs 1.25kg. It comes with a carbon laminate case said to be lighter but stronger than magnesium alloy, a sensor system that protects drive heads if it is dropped, and "rock solid" security, including fingerprint recognition.

The device also supports the use of a Bluetooth equipped headset for those wanting to make VoIP (voice over internet protocol) calls.

While smaller computers may not multi task as effortlessly as larger laptops with the new Intel dual core processors, the TX-3 should be powerful enough for most routine business travel needs – and Sony claims it offers up to seven hours battery life.

Travellers keen to leave their laptops behind might consider MobilePA, e-mail software produced by UK-based Sirenic, which can be used not only with the BlackBerry but also with a wide range of other handheld devices.

One convert is Marcus Taylor, managing director of Erlang Training and Consulting, a London-based IT systems development company: "One benefit is that the

company is not tied to any particular hardware,” he says. “People can use it with their own equipment. For example, I use it with a Sony Ericsson P910i phone, which I like because it has a touch screen and I can scribble messages.

“Another benefit is that it has what they call a relevance engine, enabling you to find every message around a keyword and you can also set it to send an SMS when certain key individuals respond to messages – so if I am trying to close a contract I can see immediately when someone has read an e-mail I have sent.”

Two new devices are providing fresh competition for Research in Motion, the company behind the BlackBerry. Nokia has just launched the E62 in the US in conjunction with the wireless carrier Cingular. Based on the E61, which has proved popular in Europe, it measures a half-inch thick, has a qwerty keyboard and colour screen and is aimed specifically at e-mail users.

And in several European countries Palm has introduced the Treo 750v. Based on Windows 5.0, this is the first smart phone to take advantage of Vodafone’s 3G/UMTS network, and allows users remote access to company and internet-based e-mail accounts.

One way of surmounting the difficulty of writing long messages on such tiny devices would be to carry Lumio’s Bluetooth enabled virtual keyboard, which uses laser technology to project keys onto a surface, though reviews suggest it would be sensible to practice before using it in earnest.

The prospect of cheaper voice calls from mobile phones could signal a drift away from the current obsession with e-mail and SMS communications. BT expects to be offering VoIP connections via a new phone by the end of the year, though it is not yet clear which manufacturer will launch the handset.

Steven Evans, BT’s director of wireless and future products, says call rates will be compatible with those paid by users of its existing VoIP service, which is available to its broadband customers.

Meanwhile, I have been trying out the Polycom Communicator, which is specially designed to allow Skype users to make hands-free or conference calls. It measures roughly 15cm x 8cm x 2cm and weighs 170g.

It has a built in USB connection under a back panel that doubles as stand. It uses acoustic echo cancellation software to enhance the quality of calls.

Clarity is impressive when calling Skype users but as product marketing manager Pat Finlayson concedes: “We have a partnership with Skype. Otherwise the clarity apparently depends on the quality of the service provider’s gateway.”

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2006