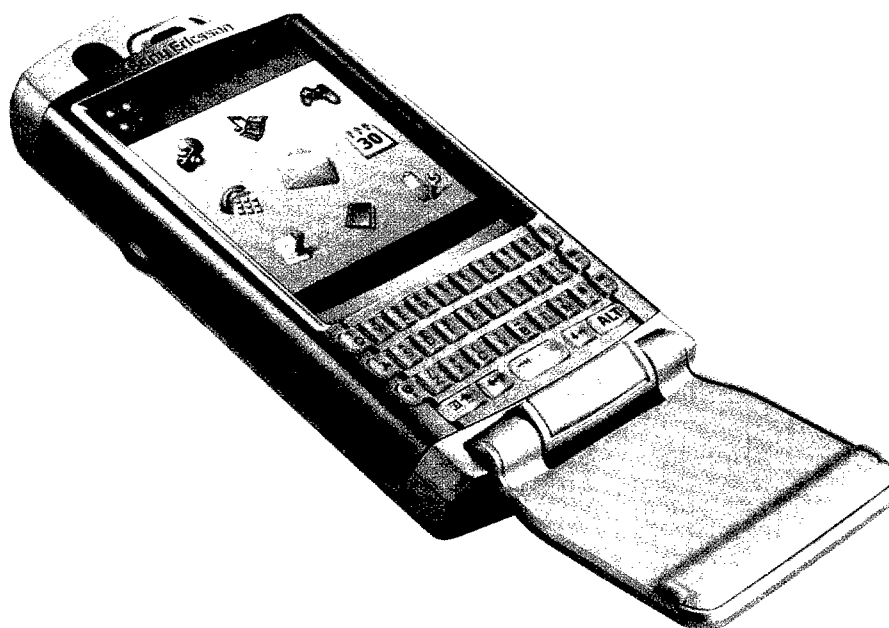




GET SMART

Adrian Weckler looks at some of the best smartphones for business travellers



SONY ERICSSON P990I

SonyEricsson has always been a pioneer of smartphones, so its P990i is one of the most anticipated new models of 2007. The iconic flip-down phone has brought on wi-fi for broadband connectivity and push e-mail for Blackberry-like e-mail updates. As with its predecessors, inputting text can be done either through the (very small) keyboard or directly on-screen with a stylus. The Symbian-based machine

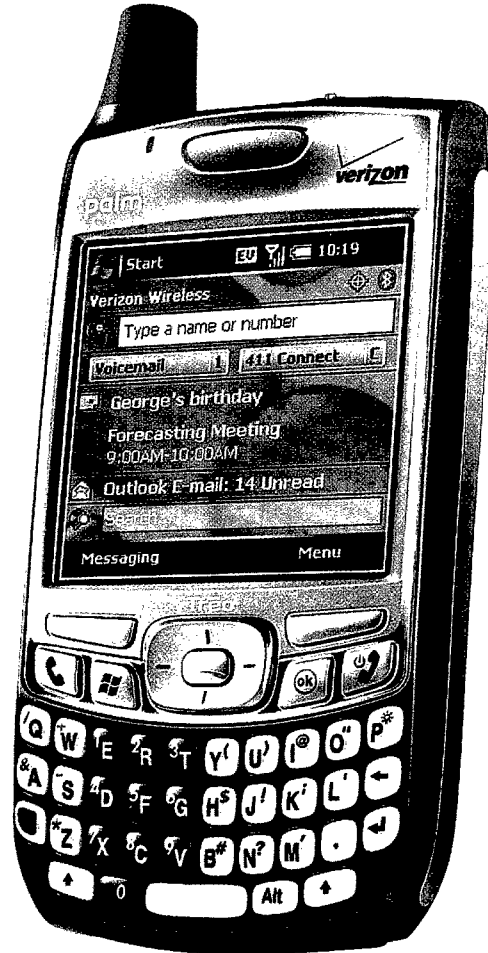
has a decent suite of business tools which work with most Microsoft applications. The P990i is a 3G device, which means internet and e-mail access speeds of about 0.3Mbps, when outside a wi-fi zone. Lastly, the P990i has a flight mode, for those who can somehow persuade the Aer Lingus stewardesses what it is and why it does not interfere with airline controls. And good luck with that. It's not all work with

the P990i. As well as its media player and two-megapixel camera, the phone also supports an accessory called LocationFree, which, with the help of a base station in your living room, relays live TV streams from your television service to your phone. Doing this requires a full 3G connection or wi-fi access, as the phone needs to "dial in" to your home network to make it work. **Cost: €675 (sim-free)**

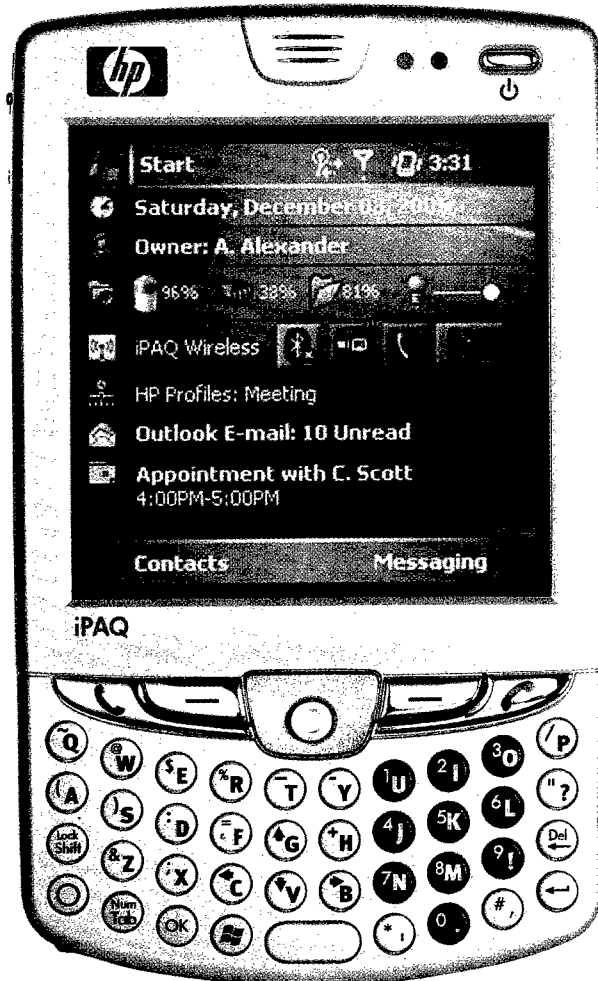
PALM TREO 750V

The Palm Pilot may be a distant memory, but Palm's latest crop of business devices are reasonably impressive. Its 750V model has a 3G connection and is prepped to work on Vodafone's higher speed data packet access (HSDPA) network, the latest mobile broadband technology that delivers access speeds of over 1Mbps to mobile devices. The 750V uses Windows Mobile, which means access to all of its business suite applications. There are two drawbacks to the 750V, however. A minor one is its weak battery life, which fares badly against most of its rivals in the smartphone market. We frequently found the phone struggling to make it through a full business day without a recharge. A more serious specification drawback, however, is its lack of wi-fi functionality, alone among business smartphone models. This has been done to facilitate its connection with Vodafone, but its lack of hotspot connection capability in airports, hotels and cafes is a significant negative for an otherwise impressive and easy-to-use mobile.

Cost: €500 (sim-free); available from Vodafone stores



HP IPAQ HW6915



As smartphones go, this has almost all of the applications a business traveller could want. And it also has one more: GPS satellite navigation. Just aim it at the sky (it's important that nothing's in the way) click open the application and it should tell you where you are and map how to get somewhere else.

TomTom has recently updated its software for Irish cities, which is to be welcomed, as it was a little sub-par up to now. Alternatively, there are good maps available for purchase from navigation software outfits such as Route 66 (available on www.mysatnav.ie). Its array of other functions is hugely impressive. These include wi-fi (802.11b), instant messaging and a host of Microsoft Office applications from its Windows Mobile 5 operating system. It has 64MB of internal memory, with a miniSD slot for extra memory capacity. Its 3-inch screen is bright and handles daylight well. It can last for up to four hours of talktime on a single charge, though our experience with the device showed that it's closer to two hours if the internet or GPS functions are used much. If you fancy a little entertainment on top of business, its Windows MediaPlayer 10 can handle videos and music. Its only real flaw, compared to some of its rivals, is that it is based on the slower 2.5G GPRS network speed (as opposed to 3G).

Cost: €500 (sim-free)

NOKIA E61

Nokia's smartphones used to be confined to its Communicator series (9300 and 9500). But this year, it has brought out the lighter E61. With on-board wi-fi and 3G, the E61 can send faxes and has USB 2.0 connectivity. The E61's web browser easily matches the Windows Mobile Explorer of its smartphone rivals. Its navigation system speeds up the scrolling process through large internet pages, and it fast-forwards the process of going back to previously viewed pages. It's also among the lightest of the current range of business smartphones. The E61 accepts several push e-mail clients, including Blackberry Connect. It also has a conference-calling facility for up to six people. Its work suite document applications are Symbian, but are fairly similar to Microsoft's Office programs. In any case, the E61's work suite applications are compatible with Microsoft Word, Powerpoint and Excel. Typing e-mails or long messages on the E61 is no more difficult than most of its rivals – those with larger fingers will find it awkward and, probably, slow. All the E61 is missing to make it a wonderful phone is a camera. Doubtless this will not bother many business travellers, but it's a shame to waste such a fine screen nonetheless.

Cost: €450 (sim-free)



WIRELESS OPTIONS: THE LOW-DOWN

Wimax

HSDPA

Wi-fi

3G

There are three ways of connecting online using 3G. The first is the old-fashioned meth-

od of attaching your 3G mobile phone to your laptop and using it as a modem.

The second is by using the phone itself, which is a feasible

option for large-screen 3G smartphones such as Nokia's E61. The third method is by use of a laptop data card. Both Vodafone and O2 offer 3G

data card products into which you can put a 3G sim-card. Once in the laptop, the data card connects to the internet at 3G speeds of between

0.2Mbps and 0.35Mbps, which is fast enough to work through e-mail and some ordinary web-browsing.

Vodafone charges €50 per month and €100 up front for the data card, while O2 charges €40 per month and €80 upfront for the data card. Vodafone's service has a data cap of 5GB, while O2's service has a cap of 2GB.

Last month, 3 Ireland became the first operator to launch a mobile broadband service, delivering speeds of up to 3.6Mbps. The technology involved is HSDPA, which works via a sim card placed in a laptop data card. 3 Ireland launched the service with full coverage in Dublin. The company says it will launch nationwide service (85 per cent of the population) this month. The service costs €25 (including Vat) per month for a maximum data cap of 250MB or €40 per month for 3GB of data usage. After that, it costs 50 cent per megabyte downloaded. This is a first foray into the business market for 3 Ireland. Vodafone Ireland is set to follow this Spring, while O2 has said it intends to launch a similar service sometime this year. Meteor will not launch a HSDPA service.

Wi-fi is wireless broadband access available on a laptop within a small area, such as a room or a building (known as a hotspot). There are estimated to be well over 1,000 publicly available wi-fi hotspots in Ireland, most of which are located in hotels, cafes and public transportation terminals. In Dublin, cafe chains with hotspots include Insomnia, Coffee Society and Starbucks.

Almost all public hotspots charge a fee for access, either a once-off connection (starting at €3 for 20 minutes) or based on a monthly subscription (available to purchase at the location). The majority of hotspots are run by one of three wi-fi operators: Bitbuzz, BT Ireland or Eircom. However,

some are free (see cafe review panel). Once connected, speeds vary from about 1Mbps to almost 11Mbps, depending on the hotspot's own connection and user volume.

Earlier this year, Irish Broadband launched the country's first wireless Wimax broadband service. Called Go, it connects from speeds of 0.35Mbps to 0.5Mbps. It currently works only in the Dublin area, with Irish Broadband claiming it will be rolled out to other cities in the New Year. Computers In Business has road tested the service over the past two months. It has proven to be fairly reliable, though there are some considerations. It achieves optimum speeds of 0.5Mbps when close to a window or an open space in central Dublin. It slips closer to 0.35Mbps when far from a window. The service also occasionally loses its signal.