Chapter 1

Your Palm Pre: The Pre-fect Phone

In This Chapter

▶ Tracing the history of how the Pre came to be

▶ Understanding the difference between the Pre and webOS

▶ Finding out what makes webOS so very different

▶ Peeping behind the scenes with "the cloud" and your Palm Profile

▶ Understanding why the Pre is so powerful — and its limits

*I*f you're reading this book, odds are very good that you have a slick, glossy, beautifully crafted, compact smartphone in your hand or pocket, or sitting on the desk next to you (conspicuously placed so that passers-by can gawk and ask questions, of course). And I can't say that I blame you for getting a Pre. Palm's latest handset (cell, phone, whatever you want to call it) is widely regarded to be the best-looking gadget the company has ever made — and arguably, it's one of the best-looking smartphones ever made by any company, period.

Of course, looks aren't everything (supermodels, movie stars, and purveyors of $300 haircuts can disagree, but then again, they're not writing this book). Long gone are the days when a phone could simply do a decent job of making calls and sending the occasional text message. Chances are that you're spending nearly as much time fiddling with your phone as you are with your computer, if not more. You expect it perform as the consummate electronic helpmate to organize your life; entertain you; and connect you with the people, places, and things that matter to you most.

Most importantly, your phone has to be simple and intuitive to use. After all, what's the point of a phone that can send e-mail if it's too much trouble to compose a new message in the amount of time it takes you to run between your 9 o'clock and 10 o'clock meetings? For starters, an easy-to-use interface and a full QWERTY keyboard would help, wouldn't they?

Fortunately, Palm's product line was founded on a couple of very basic principles:

✔ These devices should be small enough to fit in your pocket (and durable enough so that they won't break while they're there). Check!
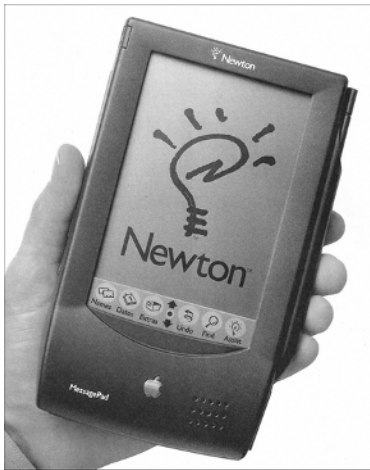
> ✔ These devices should make your life simpler, not more complicated. Double check!
>
> ✔ These devices should be affordable. Triple check!

And although the Pre bears little resemblance to its predecessors in Palm's rich lineage, those principles remain as true today as they ever have. And as you embark on your magical journey through this book, you'll find out exactly why that is.

How the Pre Came to Be

To really understand how the Pre came into this world, go back — way back, in fact, to the formative years of the so-called personal digital assistant (PDA). (See Figure 1-1.) In the early 1990s, companies like Apple were experimenting with portable devices — *long* before the iPhone, mind you — that could hold your contacts, appointments, and documents in one portable device that went everywhere you did. The look to the future was that such gadgets would eventually become standard equipment in every businessperson's (and every consumer's) arsenal.

Figure 1-1: An early PDA (the Apple Newton) and a sleek, sexy Pre.

These forethinking companies were right, of course. PDAs and PDA-like gadgets would eventually gain tremendous popularity among the young and old alike, but this wouldn't happen exactly the way these companies envisioned. The problem was that these first PDAs were heavy, frequently too big to slip into a jacket or pants pocket, often required many hours of training to use correctly, and were devastatingly expensive, putting them out of reach of virtually anyone who couldn't foot the bill with a corporate expense account.

That's where Palm came into play. The company's first models (PalmPilots) were released in 1996 and totally bucked the trend set by Apple and others. All Palm wanted to do was make a cheap, tiny organizer that could effectively manage the information you needed to make it through a day, run forever (not literally, but almost) on a single set of alkaline batteries, and sync your calendar effortlessly with your computer so that you could have your information at your fingertips regardless of whether you were at your desk or on the road. It was a brilliant concept, and Palm sold these first models by the boatloads.

Eventually, Palm's founders wanted to stretch their legs and try something new. They left the company they helped create to start a new one — Handspring — which made more advanced PDAs incorporating innovations like color screens, using Palm's software.

Over time, Handspring got into the business of creating smartphones, which at the time were almost unheard of. Many people hadn't even yet begun to carry a cellphone of *any* sort, let alone a smart one. It was a bold move that led to the creation of the first Treo smartphones that elegantly combined Palm's established software, a phone, and attractive design in a single gadget. Treo went on to become one of the most successful smartphone brands in history, and odds are good that you've owned one or two in the past ten years — I know I have!

Palm knew a good thing when it saw one and ended up buying Handspring, reuniting the company's founders and bringing the Treo line of phones into its own product portfolio. In an effort to strengthen the business, the company split into two separate firms: PalmSource, focusing on the Palm OS software; and palmOne, focusing on the actual PDA and smartphone hardware.

Of course, nothing ever works out quite the way you expect it to, does it? PalmSource ended up being purchased by the Japanese firm ACCESS, and palmOne (which eventually changed its name back to Palm — go figure) gravitated toward the competing Windows Mobile software from Microsoft. Palm eventually stopped making PDAs altogether to concentrate on its smartphone business, but with fierce competition from the Apple iPhone, BlackBerry, and others, it was unclear how it'd manage, especially without a modern OS of its own.

Palm knew it needed a change to stay on top of its game — a *big* change. It had to create a really awesome smartphone, and an even more awesome OS to underpin it. It took a couple of years, but the groundbreaking Pre was ultimately introduced in January of 2009 — and released in June of 2009 — along with Palm's all-new operating system, webOS. You can see the significant look and feel in Figure 1-2). Finally, after years of floundering, Palm had returned to its roots.

It's an exciting time to own a Palm again!

Pre and webOS: Like peanut butter and jelly

There's an important distinction between the Pre and the OS under its hood: webOS. Just like Palm OS in the good ol' days, webOS can run on a variety of devices — not just the Pre. At the time of this writing, the Pre is the only webOS device available, but that's not to say that you won't be able to pick from 2 or 5 or even 20 webOS-powered smartphones down the road.

So, a lot of what you can glean about the Pre from this book and from experience using the phone will be transferrable to other webOS phones that you might buy in the future. You won't have to relearn basic tasks, which is a nice little bonus. Palm has said that webOS is its platform of choice for the next decade, so your expertise will be useful for many years to come. It also means that this book shouldn't see a recycling bin for a *long* time, so keep it around as a reference, even if your Pre is long gone!
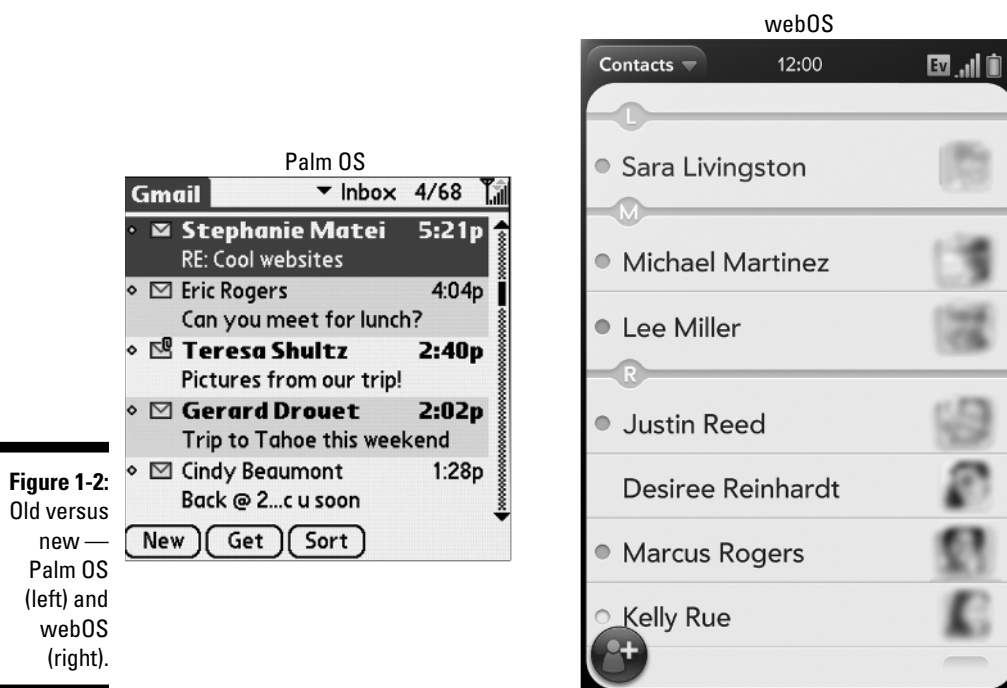

Figure 1-2: Old versus new — Palm OS (left) and webOS (right).

The Truth behind webOS

To be sure, the Pre is a great-looking, great-feeling, nimble phone, but the real story at Palm these days is the all-new software that powers the Pre: webOS. Here are some of the big stand-out features that make webOS special.

Linux-based

Like Windows and Mac OS X, Linux is a powerful, secure OS capable of underpinning some of the world's most high-performance servers, desktop PCs, and laptops. Linux, renowned for its versatility, has been adapted for use on everything from cable boxes to the GPS system in your car. For you, it means that webOS already comes built-in with 20 years of bug fixes, performance improvements, and enhanced features thanks to the work that's been done in the Linux programmer community.

Programmed like the Web

You probably won't notice it, but most applications that you use on your Pre are based on the same technologies that power the Web — HTML, JavaScript, CSS, and the like. That means that it's easier and faster than ever for developers to create smartphone applications, so even if the App Catalog seems a bit light at the moment, you should be seeing a plethora of exciting programs become available for your Pre in record time.

Open to you, application developers, and the world

Palm provides interested developers with all the tools they need to develop apps, but Palm goes one step further and offers to the public much of the code used to create webOS. By allowing developers to see this code, they can better understand how it works, which helps them create better apps of their own and point out potential flaws to Palm that can be fixed with an operating system software update. And speaking of operating system software updates, keep reading.

Over-the-air (OTA) updates

Some smartphones (ahem; most notably the iPhone) need to connected to a computer to be updated. In webOS, however, application updates and OS updates can be performed using your wireless signal alone. That means that you'll have the latest, greatest version of webOS available faster (and with less effort). In fact, the Pre will automatically update itself!

A revolutionary user interface

Unless the Pre is your very first smartphone (in which case, welcome to the club!), you've already seen what a typical smartphone's UI looks like. And I can guarantee you that regardless of whether you're coming from an iPhone, a Windows Mobile phone, a BlackBerry phone, or any other phone, you've never seen anything that looks quite like webOS. Between the card interface, the wave launcher, and gesture support (all of which I cover in the coming chapters), it's a *very* fresh take on how a phone should work — and I'm pretty sure you're going to like it! Check it out in Figure 1-3.

Figure 1-3:
webOS and
Pre put a
fresh face
on a phone
interface.

Multitasking

As any iPhone owner can tell you, it's a bummer not being able to use multiple applications at the same time. Take Pandora Radio, for example, which is "on" in Figure 1-4). On the iPhone, you have to cut the music and exit the app if you want to check your e-mail, but with the Pre, the music just keeps on playing. On your Pre, you can run as many applications as you like at the same time, like you see in Figure 1-4. You're limited only by the amount of memory that the Pre has available, and don't worry — there's plenty of it, and it'll let you know if you're running out.

Synergy

Here's a problem you're probably all too familiar with. You have umpteen different instant messaging accounts and a bunch of e-mail inboxes, and you manage your contacts in three different places. The Synergy technology of webOS seeks to make managing all those tools a lot simpler by aggregating them into a single place. For example, say you have information about Joe Smith on Google Contacts, and you also know the same Joe Smith through Facebook. Your Pre can pull information from both sources into a single contact on the phone, and it won't duplicate the entries! It's got other tricks up its sleeve, too, like creating single threads of communication between you and others. In other words, if you talk to Joe on two IM accounts and you text message him a few times on top of that, it'll all appear on your Pre in a single window organized by time. Very cool.

Figure 1-4: Look, ma, Pandora is still running!

Run more than one app at once.

Data freedom

Because your contacts, calendar, and application data are all silently and continuously synchronized to Palm's systems on the Internet, it's not a big deal if you lose your phone. (Well, it is, but hopefully not as *big* of a deal.) If that happens and you end up getting a new phone, just enter your Palm Profile login information to immediately get your critical information back right over the air. You can even remotely delete your old phone's memory, so that if your phone is truly lost or was stolen, no one will have access to your data.

Alerts

As important things happen on your Pre — meeting reminders occur, new e-mails, and so on — they collect at the bottom of the screen. That way, you can continue working without having to immediately acknowledge an alert. The alert icons keep hanging out at the bottom of the screen as a constant reminder that your phone is trying to tell you something important.

And that's just the beginning. Throughout this book, you'll learn more about all of these great webOS features and a whole lot more.

Plugging In with Your Palm Profile

Just like your e-mail address or your Google account, your Palm Profile helps define who you are in the digital world. When you turn on your Pre for the first time, it will ask you whether you already have a Palm Profile. If not, you'll create one on the spot because it's *just that important* for everything that the Pre does.

But what is a profile exactly?

If you owned a Palm from the old days, you probably remember the connecting your phone to a dock and pressing a button to synchronize your contacts, schedules, tasks, notes, and other goodies between what you'd changed on your computer that day with what you'd changed on your Palm. With the Pre, though, Palm decided that syncing by connecting your phone to a computer is way too much trouble. After all, your phone and your computer both have access to the same Internet, so what's the point in connecting them to exchange information when they can just communicate to the same services like Google, Exchange, and Facebook?

These kinds of Internet-based communal services are collectively known as "the cloud" — and not because they're white, puffy, and in the sky. (See Figure 1-5.) The term *cloud* is used as a metaphor for the Internet. Your data simply isn't all stored on one magical computer somewhere on the Internet (that'd be too easy!). But how do you get to all of it without tearing your hair out in the process? Put simply, your Palm Profile is what ties your information to you the cloud. You are you, no matter where you are or what you do.

As you add e-mail and calendar accounts, applications, and other information to your Pre, details are automatically saved to your Palm Profile. If you ever change to a different Pre or change to another kind of webOS phone (whatever that may be), you'll be able to instantly associate your Palm Profile to it and get back all your most important information right away. Gone are the days when losing your phone meant losing your contacts. As long as you have a Palm Profile, you can get back all your important info, no sweat.
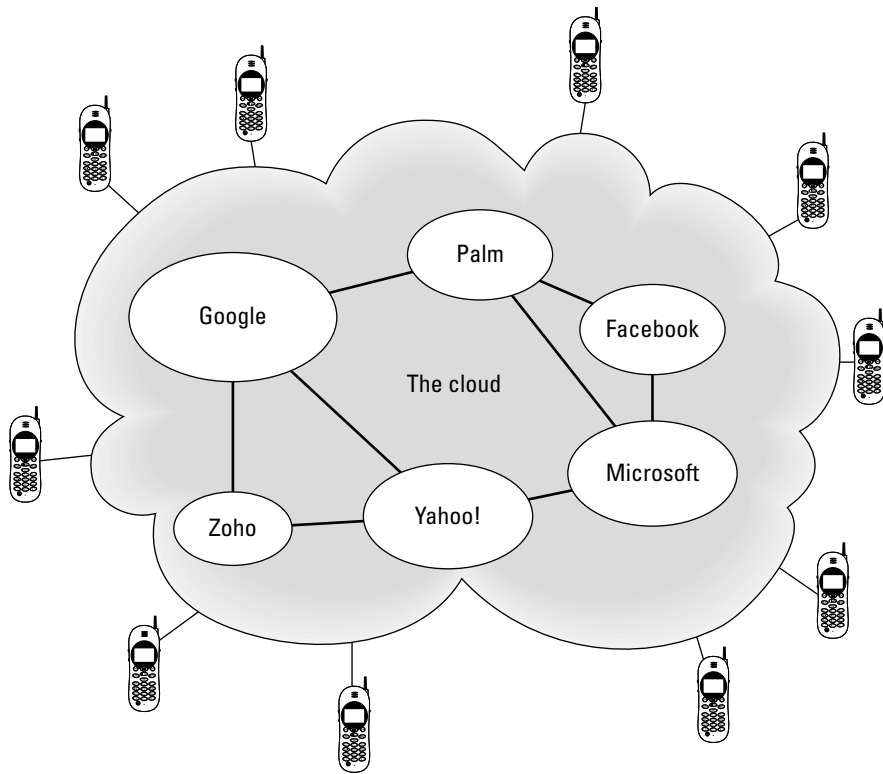
The Sky's the Limit . . .

The Pre is an incredibly powerful phone, and you'll find that you can do all sorts of stuff from the road that you may not have thought possible. You won't just be replying to text messages and e-mails — you'll be viewing Office documents, watching TV, finding your way when you get lost, browsing your favorite Web sites, and everything in between. There's even an application you can download that helps you run old Palm OS apps that you might have lying around!

The possibilities are limitless with webOS, and it's still a young platform. It'll be exciting to see what the Pre is going to be able to do as application developers stretch their imaginations and Palm rolls out updates over the coming months and years. And remember, any update that Palm makes will be automatically downloaded to your Pre with no hassle and no fuss. It doesn't get any easier than that.

. . . But It's Still a Limit

Is there anything your Pre can't do? If you purchased your Pre from Sprint in the United States or from Bell in Canada, that means you're using the CDMA version of the phone. CDMA is a wireless technology that isn't very common around the world, and you generally won't be able to take it overseas with you; it simply won't be able to make or receive calls or connect to the Internet.

Note: As of this writing, Verizon is also expected to release a CDMA version of the phone.

GSM is the far-more common type of wireless phone network around the world, used by carriers like AT&T, T-Mobile, Rogers, Vodafone, and countless others. If you purchased your Pre in Europe, that means that it's a GSM version, and you'll be able to use it pretty much anywhere although you won't have access to high-speed data services when you're in the United States or Canada because of the different radio frequencies that are used.

If you have a Sprint or Bell Pre, you might want to ask your network provider whether it has GSM phones available that you can take with you when you're leaving the country. Providers don't often advertise it, but typically, they can help you out so you still have access to a phone while you're globetrotting.