



PART 1

WHY *STAR TREK* IS SCIENCE PAST

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Chapter 1

So, You'd Like a Handheld

"I can't keep track of all the pieces of paper for my job. I think I need a bigger pocket."

No, you don't. You need a PDA.

"Great, another three-letter abbreviation."

PDA stands for personal digital assistant. It is a computer that is small enough to hold in your hand or keep in your pocket. It helps you organize all the information you need to keep track of as a chef or food-service professional. Susan uses hers for prep lists, lists of food stuffs to order, and pictures of plated foods for new menu consultant projects.

"A computer? That means it's expensive, takes ages to figure out, then crashes."

Not necessarily. Many handhelds are quite the opposite. This is why you might have seen a few of your colleagues using them in foodservice. Handhelds are already very popular in corporate and institutional sectors. It is increasingly becoming the norm for independent restaurateurs, waitstaff, and customers to use them, and they're beginning to become popular "tools" with back-of-the-house personnel. If you don't get in the habit of using one, you may be missing out.

“OK then, tell me more.”

Handhelds are now affordable, with prices starting at \$150 for a good machine. If you want extras such as a camera, Internet access, a telephone, voice recorder, or even a car-navigation system, you will pay more. Nevertheless, even the cheapest model is powerful enough to handle some generic foodservice software.

They are also simple to use. Whereas your first brush with a desktop computer was probably a painful learning experience, you will quickly learn how to use a handheld. You can write on one using a pen (or even your finger), and the programs are simple and clear.

Nor do handhelds crash all the time. Instead, their reliability makes them perfect for the foodservice setting.

“But how does this ‘PDA’ thing help me in my job?”

All handhelds come with the four essentials—diary, address book, to-do list, and memo pad. These programs are simple and quick to use but much more powerful than any paper organizer. For example, the to-do list lets you keep track of your jobs and arrange them by employee and production and delivery schedules. The diary keeps track of all your appointments. The address book includes the phone numbers of all the employees and vendors for your foodservice operation.

One way to collect all these numbers provides a further illustration of the machine's power—the capability for a colleague to beam them to you.

“‘Beam?’”

Beaming is the process of transferring information from one handheld to another using each machine's infrared port. So, when you bump into a friend who has a handheld with the information you need, just line up your machine with theirs, and ask them to beam the information you need. In a few seconds, you can have over 100 addresses copied across. Then you can beam your own addresses back to them, and so on.



"That's very caring, but can I do anything else apart from swapping phone numbers?"

This is where the fun begins. There are literally thousands of programs available to allow your handheld to do extra things. These include recipe references that compile shopping lists; books, music, and videos for your entertainment; the latest news and journals; and games, of course. Many of these take advantage of beaming technology.

"Now you're talking. How do I get one of these machines?"

That's easy—they are on sale in most computer shops, in cell phone shops, and via the Internet. The trouble is choosing from among all the models.

Your first decision is probably determined by your budget. Prices start at a very reasonable \$150, but you can easily spend \$900, if you are not careful. For \$200, you can get a machine, with a color screen, that runs Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. After that, extra money gets you cool features but does not affect the kind of programs you can use on it.

Your next choice is between a handheld with the Palm or Pocket PC operating system.

“I knew this was going to get technical. . . .”

All you need to know is that there are currently two major types of handhelds: one works with the Palm operating system, and the other with Pocket PC. Palm machines are the cheapest and simplest to use, whereas Pocket PCs tend to be more powerful. One thing to be aware of though is that many of your colleagues will have Palm machines. That means most generic foodservice software is only available for the Palm, and beaming is easier if you have the same type of device as your colleagues do.

Finally, you should always check before buying the handheld that it works with your main desktop or laptop computer. Why? Because handhelds can place a copy of all their information on a desktop or laptop computer. It is a great feature, so if anything bad happens to your handheld, such as theft or accidental coffee spillage, a copy of your information is still safe.

Try doing that with your pocket full of paper.