

PDAGeek FEATURES

Tell Psion What You Think!

Q&A with Patricia Miller, Psion's Strategic Communications Manager

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All text är hämtad från Geeks hemsida den 1 juni 2001,

May 4: Tell Psion what you think! - In today's PDAGeek newsletter, Joel announced that Patricia Miller, Psion's Strategic Communications Manager, will answer your questions, suggestions, gripes, etc. about Psion's products, strategy, marketing, etc. If you've got something on your mind about Psion, EPOC, Symbian, etc., submit it below. We'll get your submissions to Patricia and then we'll post her responses. Go for it! :)

- submitted by ChiefEditor

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Adress: <http://www.geek.com/pdageek/features/askpsion/index.htm>

Part 1

Connectivity | Battery Problems | Hard Choices | Backlight | Build Quality | Flash OSes | Bluetooth | Generation Gaps | Series 7 LEATHER? | Falling Behind | Leather | Future Products | Psion in danger of becoming the OS/2 of the PDA World | Entry-level Device | Connectivity Issues | Canada | Upgrades | Leather | netBook Support | Mac Connectivity | Marketing | netBook/Upgrades | What Next for Psion?

Connectivity (8:39am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Hello Ms. Miller.

I'm a once-Palm-now-Revo-user that is seriously considering moving back to the Palm platform. I bought the Revo for its power and its functionality, and I bought it under the premise that Psion was working on better desktop synchronization for the Revo, particularly for the Macintosh. As you (and all Macintosh Psion users) know, Psion has not released software that allows Macintosh users to do anything but basic file transfer and backup, and the software that is marketed (which again offers less functionality than the free-but-faulty software provided for PC users) costs an _additional_ \$70 over the cost of the unit.

I'd really like to know how Psion can justify its PDAs as "connected" PDAs. Ultimately my contention with this claim of Psions revolves around the question--"connected to _what_?" I've had lengthy email correspondence with the US office, urging them to look at Usenet newsgroups to get an idea of how Psion users (of both Mac and PC flavors) would benefit from increased interoperability between their palmtops and their desktops. They said a new version of the Mac product was to be released late last year.

I know it's easy to dismiss these Macintosh concerns as those of a "small portion of the market," but keep in mind that Psion is also [now] a small portion of its market. Furthermore, these concerns that Psion has an ultimately ambivalent attitude towards its users are not held exclusively by the Mac market. This site said a new Mac package was to be announced early in the first quarter of this year. We're coming up on the close of the second quarter. Where is it? If it indeed exists, will we have to pay a Mac tax?

- resonance

Answer:

Resonance,

Thanks for your e-mail, and for being the first to plunge into the forum. Moving back to the 16-bit Palm platform would be a step backwards in terms of power. Mac synchronisation has turned out to be a real downer for us. We had a serious disagreement with our preferred supplier of the software which led to the termination of our agreement with them. There are a number of software developers in the Psion community working on Mac solutions; we are just waiting for one good enough to endorse. So far, our best has not been good enough.

As for connected PDAs, Psions are connected to the Internet. We don't believe the PC will die (good news for Microsoft), but it will decline substantially in significance over the next 10 years. Your data will be held

on the Internet, and Psions will be one of a number of devices through which you can access it--power and speed become even more important.

By the way, for those Mac developers out there, the lucrative opportunities of developing for the Symbian platform itself are quite substantial (www.symbian.com)

Battery Problems (9:11am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: There are literally hundreds of messages on the Revoworld discussion board regarding the unreliability and problems caused by the rechargeable batteries on the Revo device. Despite numerous requests, Psion still will not admit to the problem, or issue a statement on how it can be resolved. It seems the only way to get it fixed is to have it sent back for an expensive repair. My Revo as many others has being sent back for the same problem to reoccur time and time again. Why will Psion not give an official explanation for this problem and why should users pay for recurrent firmware repairs outside the warranty period? I would ask Ms Miller to visit the Revoworld 'battery problems' discussion boards. I'm sure she and her colleagues would find it a very educational experience.

- Kieran Ball

Answer:

Kieran,

This is not a cop-out! Psion is actively investigating this issue. We will let you know our findings as soon as we have them.

Hard Choices (9:11am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Thanks for sitting in the hot seat, Patricia. I'm a Product Manager myself and have had to live with hard (constraint-driven) choices made in bringing my products to market. Thanks for listening and reporting back to the mothership.

At different times, I bought and returned both a 5mx and a Diamond Mako.

The products missed by a hair each time: the 5mx needed better screen contrast but had a GREAT keyboard and form factor for typing and GREAT screensize. The Mako had a mediocre keyboard but a great screen contrast and a great form factor for pocketability.

Improving one or the other would have gotten my \$600. Psion stopped short on both devices.

My advice: pick a strength and leverage it for all it is worth. Palm did that, and look where they are.

The 5mx was close to perfect, but the decisions to limit the screen contrast turned its greatest competitive advantage into a liability.

You look at the screen EVERY DAY, and it was the device's competitive advantage over other PDA's.

If the Revo is your future platform, improve that keyboard and backlight. Pack as many 5mx features in that form factor as you can-cut start with the keyboard and backlight. Bluetooth is a gimmick that yes, will appeal to some, but you use the keyboard EVERY DAY. And I'll bet you use the backlight in more situations than Bluetooth.

Personally, my dream machine is a 5mx with Revo screen contrast, even if it means no backlight. I'd pay \$600 for it--today. The form factor is right,

the keyboard is excellent, and nobody packs a bigger screen in a smaller space than Psion.

Thanks for the forum.

- Jay Karlson

Answer:

Jay,

Thanks for the compliments. I've sent your e-mail back to the product development team and will try to let you know their comments when they come back to me. At the time the Series 5mx was released, the screen technology used was the best solution available to us, and we used it. We received a good bit of feedback from users, many of whom had moved from a Series 3x to a 5mx, saying exactly what you have. So, when we released the Revo and Revo Plus, we worked hard to incorporate a screen that brought back the clarity of the Series 3 screens. Designing these machines is all about compromise--so let's hope we get the compromise right for you in our next device. As for your dream machine, we won't be hitting everything on your wish list, but when you see the next product we release I think you'll agree we're moving in the right direction. More on that later!

Backlight (9:11am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: When will you have a backlite for the Revo. I have had Psions since the 3a and 3c (which I still have)and resisted the Palms and PC's, but they are very tempting. Will there an upgrade soon with easy internet access?

- Steve Kafrissen

Answer:

Steve,

Backlight for the Revo? Let's put it this way. It is the single most demanded extra function from our users, according to the surveys and user feedback we did after the launch of the Revo Plus. All we can say to our users is: We have heard you!

Build quality (9:34am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: I have a 5mx, and previously a series 5. I think these are wonderful machines, and couldn't live without mine. Unfortunately, the build quality is terrible: what are your plans to make more robust systems, which do not need repair every six months?

- csp

Answer:

CSP,

Wow, of all the first e-mails that came in to Geek, this is the one that really took me by surprise. The 5mx has a reputation for being bulletproof, and has one of the lowest incidences of return and build faults of any product, so I'm a bit baffled by what has happened with your unit. If you'd like to e-mail me directly, please do so--I'd like to find out more about the troubles you've had, as they are NOT usual. Please contact Joel from Geek.com (Joel@Geek.com) and he'll put you in touch with me.

Flash OSeS (9:48am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: I've just got my series 7, and very lovely it is too. In combination with my girlfriends Revo Plus it does everything we need. But! I've also fallen in love with the Symbian screenshot's that I've seen. Some websites show a flash upgradable capability for Psion's and I know the PsiLinux project jhas but a different OS on them! Just interested if you'll run a return to base (I understand you don't want *us* mucking around in the bowels) upgrade to symbian v.6 or 6.1. I personally would pay up to £100-150 for this as it looks so *lovely*. Please keep up the consumer products as it'd be a shame to see a great British manufacturer forced out of the business.

- nedrichards

Answer:

Nedrichards,

The 5mx Pro and the netBook are the only devices Psion currently produces with the potential for flash upgradable capability, but we are delighted both you and your girlfriend are happy users.

Bluetooth (9:51am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: oh, what about a bluetooth PCMCIA (or CF sized) card to retrofit to older devices? And any new product information that you're allowed to say. Thanks again.

- nedrichards

Answer:

Ned,

I'm afraid I'm going to have to be a bit vague on this one--please don't take it personally. What was the acronym the respondent from Microsoft used? AANATCAM? At any rate, I can say that solutions such as the one you suggest have been considered, but there is no firm position at the moment.

As you may be aware, Psion has a strong commitment to Bluetooth, and has a number of developments that are beginning to trickle out. Most of these are to corporations at the moment, as everyone involved with Bluetooth works on dotting the i's and crossing the t's with Bluetooth as a new technology; but you'll see a lot of Bluetooth releases out of Psion, and some of them quite soon--INCLUDING a PDA. Stay tuned, Bluetooth is going to be quite exciting!

Generation Gaps (10:50am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Psion machines seem to run through an obvious series of generations, each very distinct from its predecessor. Compared to competitors in the PDA market, releases of new hardware and software seem to come along slowly and in discrete steps. Palm seems to manage to revive it's product line-up frequently and not to expect customers to wait for (all-too) infrequent releases.

While the Revo has undoubtedly been a success with end users, it offers no real possibility for upgrade. The Series 5mx is now looking very long in the tooth and the netBook/Series 7 is over-specified for most users. Updates to the operating system for the netBook have never really materialised since that product was released. Latest releases of EPOC have supported colour

for some time now but the core applications have never been updated to take advantage of these capabilities.

Will Psion still remain a significant player in the PDA market for the large number of current users who are loyal to the brand (Organiser II through to netBook in my case) but have no need for 'communicators'? There would undoubtedly be advantages to users in having a PDA platform that is maintained more regularly (flash updates à la Palm) and provides more frequent hardware updates.

Thanks,

- Steve Hodgson

Answer:

Steve,

It is a no-win situation with product cycles. Some say we should produce a new device more frequently. Others say they want their new machine to stay "new" for longer. We do take a different view from Palm, which has been selling essentially the same device to consumers for many years now (good device though it is). We have several distinct and unique device families that we offer to consumers. Flash updates are only possible with the Series 5mxPro (Germany) and the netBook.

Series 7 LEATHER? (10:57am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Hello,

I've been lugging my way-to-heavy laptop around the planet for years, wishing there were something available with a real keyboard and capable of standing up to the battles of the road. PDA's were unacceptable... can't imagine writing anything longer than a few paragraphs with Graffiti or even those folding keyboards. I owned a Sony Vaio for a while, hated it - too flimsy.

Then I discovered the Series 7, and I fell in love. It seemed to meet all my requirements: smaller than a breadbox, respectable keyboard, color screen, built like a brick . BUT... it has one feature that I can not live with - the leather exterior finish. I do not use leather anywhere, anytime, no way no how. Soooo, I tried to find out if Psion, indeed, uses leather to cover it's 7, or if it's really a good imitation. So far, I haven't gotten any answers.

Can you please tell me if the outer skin of the most lusted for Seven is synthetic leather or not? You know I hope it is!

Thanks,

- Eugene Martinez

Answer:

Eugene,

You are exactly the sort of user we designed the Series 7 for--those who spend a lot of time on the road, and who realize that you hardly ever need the complicated apps we all have installed on our laptops while you're out there. Spreadsheets, e-mails, word processing, and PIM stuff are all we all (most of us!) use on the road.

Alas, here's the bad news. The casing *is* leather. Real, honest to goodness leather.

Falling Behind (10:59am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: My perception is that Psion have dropped back as a result of all the maneuvering and restructuring, and sometimes appear to have taken their eye off the ball. Is this a fair appraisal, and do you consider all the messing about to be completed now?

- NoJags Neil

Answer:

NoJags,

There has been a substantial bear market in all technology stocks and we have not gone unaffected, along with our friends at Palm, Handspring, and Microsoft. We have had to restructure along with many other companies so that we are in better shape to deal with the new, exciting emerging markets.

Leather (11:07am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Oh, and I particularly like the leather on my Seven.

- NoJags Neil

Answer:

Glad to hear it!!

Future products (11:41am EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: My feeling is that Psion is a good company that produces very useable products but unfortunately still has a small market share. Personally I feel the main issue here is the point of sale appeal of the products compared to other players in the market. We now have ipaq and casios with colour screens and fast processors capable of playing mp3s and pocketpc games. Eventhough microsoft's standard applications still fall far behind the useability of standard EPOC apps, this hasn't stopped compaq having a back log of 600,000 units on order.

What I'd like to see are more things that appeal to the customer immediately rather than discovering things after prolonged use because this will not sell products. the customer needs to be convinced to buy psion products when he/she walks into a shop and has a brief encounter with these devices.

I'd like to see the company succeed since I do feel it has a good team can produce good products, however time is of the essence as market share is being grabbed by other players ion the market.

All the best.

- Amir

Answer:

Amir,

Thanks for the good words, and your hopes for us to succeed. We're on the job!

Psion has built a great company on offering a set of high-end, high-capability products to a specific set of users. The idea is to cast a limited and focused net, not necessarily a broad and all-encompassing one. As you yourself point out, Psion's core apps far outreach the capabilities in others'

applications, and we aim to continue down that road. If you think of our goal as to provide people with a useful tool, not a toy, our decisions to date make sense.

For instance, I tried out an iPAQ for a few weeks (found it easy to get one--far too many in the stores) and tried to run it through its paces. MP3 sucked the battery dry in 20 minutes. What use is a handheld to me when it is dead in 20 minutes? All Psion products work hard, and stay true to our commitment to maintaining outstanding battery life.

As for colour screens, (that's color, for American readers!) our consumer studies and feedback tell us loud and clear that people want long battery life, and that since colour screens drain batteries at a breathtaking speed, they're happy to stick with what they are getting at the moment. We're looking at colour options, but until we can find a way to keep your batteries lasting longer and keep the cost down, we won't do it.

Psion in danger of becoming the OS/2 of the PDA world Part 1 (12:54pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Dear Ms. Miller,

Over the past two years I have worked smarter, and less, by utilizing my 5mx wherever possible. Managing appointments, writing documents, playing games, and writing Java code.

As a professional java programmer, and OS enthusiast, I can appreciate the elegance of the EPOC OS. Simplicity, stability, and efficiency combine with the innovative Psion hardware to provide an excellent user experience.

I can only make these claims, though, since I took the 600USD gamble that both the software and hardware would function as well as everyone as [everyone on the discussion boards] had said. Psion did not provide many any "feel good" or "cool features" that really draw people into purchasing a PDA. Instead, it was the strong user base that truly sold me on the system.

Today, Psion is the OS/2 of the PDA world. You may remember in the early 90's, OS/2 was an excellent 32-bit operating system. Unlike Windows, it provided true 32-bit multitasking, at the same time it ran Windows and DOS programs faster than on the platform on that they were built to run! Unlike the then infant implementation of GNU/Linux, OS/2 was easy to install and had a huge assortment of software.

Unfortunately, IBM failed to advertise OS/2. Additionally, OS/2 didn't have the "bells and whistles" that bring in the hundreds of thousands of users that are needed to keep the operating system in production. Does this sound like Psion? Yes.

99% of the people who ask me about my 5mx have never heard of Psion (I live in the U.S.A.). Since Psion fails to advertise, I relied on the hordes of Psion enthusiasts which may be found on the net. Anyone remember team-os2? Team os2 was a group of OS/2 enthusiasts who took it upon themselves to promote the dying operating system. Had it not been for ugeek, foxpop, and usenet I would have never purchased my 5mx.

- Grant Rettke

Answer:

Mr. Rettke,

Thanks for the comments--I'm glad you are putting a 5mx to good use.

Psion is a licensee of the EPOC OS from Symbian. Symbian is a joint venture between us, Motorola, Nokia, Ericsson, and Panasonic. The Symbian OS will dominate the market for smartphones and communicators and these are already beginning to appear in the US, thus the idea that it will become an industry standard technology.

The US has always been a tough market for Psion. As America has been quite slow to adopt world mobile phone standards, it doubles or triples costs for us, which hits particularly hard in a market where we have a smaller market share. What we would have to do is throw hundreds of millions of dollars at a market not only to educate consumers about our products, but essentially to educate consumers about the shortcomings of various mobile phone technologies, and I can think of precious few companies with pockets that deep.

So yes, the North American market is a large one, but all we can do is work within the parameters of a computer company, not try to singlehandedly educate about 300 million people. That's a losing battle for anyone.

Psion in danger of becoming the OS/2 of the PDA world Part 2 (12:56pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: While not Windows 3.1 piece of software was the best, there was a LOT of it and a wide assortment of vendors to choose from. Remember, competition increases quality and lowers price (at least that's the dream :). OS/2 on the other hand was really straining to keep up with the latest popular software developments needed to draw in new users. EPOC software is awesome, but limited. Palm and PocketPC have loads of software, some of it, I've heard, is very well written and usable. Regardless of I think though, the fact remains that Psion is a business which must profit.

Right now it would appear that %80 of Psion's profits are coming in from %20 of the market. That's %20 probably includes the majority of people reading this post, and this website. That same %20 probably are computer enthusiasts, business people, and programmers. This same bunch probably owns at least two PDA's.

It is impossible to argue that "Psion needs to stop preaching to the converted", since they fail even to take this much initiative. Instead, I would argue that Psion ought to start focusing on the other %80 of the market who are NOT purchasing their product. Instead of rambling on and on about Bluetooth, of which perhaps %.01 of the market would actually care, think about a color screen and hardware multimedia capabilities that bring in the droves of users. Most people who purchase iPaqs love the color screen and multimedia features but then come to learn that the underlying OS is unreliable and the productivity software is less than perfect. Well, Psions hardware, and EPOC, are already great for productivity. Add the "bells and whistles". One the users get tired of playing games and watching movies, they will find a great software and hardware package that will help them truly "get things done".

I've enjoyed using your product and look forward to future releases. Good luck.

- Grant Rettke

Answer:

Again, good observations, but limited to a US perspective.

There is a strong and well-supported developer community for EPOC (see www.symbian.com)--somewhere around 60K developers, if I remember rightly from a recent conversation with Symbian. As well, there are thousands of pieces of third-party software out there for EPOC--see go32.com, 5alive.com, and a host of others.

And, I'd be interested in why you think so poorly of Bluetooth. I think in 12 months Bluetooth is going to take off like a storm!

Entry-level device? (1:01pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: One thing that the EPOC market has not done successfully is to produce a reliable, low-cost alternative to the more high-powered machines. The Revo almost qualifies- it is a stripped-down version of the 5mx that fits the pocket better and has the style and functionality to reach college students and casual users. But the price tag is still double what it should be to capture that demographic. The Palm 100 is the perfect example of what I'm talking about. Palm put interesting technology and reasonable functionality within the reach of ordinary people. It seems that Psion would more than make their money back on such a device, given the good reviews the OS gets in the media.

A first step might be to send such a project out of house. This was tried with the Osaris (the Geofox was more along the lines of a professional machine), and the specs for the Osaris were good. The price was still a tad high, but the Osaris gave the user everything that EPOC could offer, with some minor adjustments in screen size (and, therefore, software compatibility). But the Osaris fell flat in three critical ways: 1) poor build quality, 2) poor marketing (and underdeveloped customer support), and, most critically, 3) poor cooperation from Psion/Symbian when hardware and software problems arose. The Osaris was a promising product, if not for those issues, and all of those problems were avoidable. The Osaris experiment is a bust, but it should not be the last experiment of its kind.

The Symbian OS is easily the most powerful and full-featured of any current handheld, bar none. It lags behind, not in quality, but in broad appeal. The Palm OS is well-designed, but not superior in any particular. The Palm OS succeeds by getting into as many hands as possible. EPOC could do the same.

- Doug Oglesby

Answer:

Doug,

The Osaris was manufactured by a different company and I think their experiences probably answer the question you have posed. It is perfectly feasible for other licensees of the EPOC platform to produce high volume, low cost, low functionality devices. This is not a market that Psion is a player in--we aim to service the premium quality, high functionality market.

Connectivity Issues (1:31pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Hi Patricia,

Here is a connectivity gripe with a twist. My company bought me a new laptop yesterday, and I set about installing PsiWin. The software build is supposed to be exactly the same as my old laptop, just the processor, memory and screen are different. Psiwin doesn't work on the new laptop, and this makes my Series 5mx 100% ineffective in it's main activities -

meeting notes, agenda and contacts. If there is one thing I would beg Psion to do (and I've been a Psion user since my first Series 3, many years ago) it would be --- please develop a good, reliable, fast connectivity programme that links to my e-mail (lotus notes, using InSync Pro at the moment), lets me copy documents etc, and will work between machine. So far, I have used 4 PCs and had 4 different problems installing PsiWin.

A second issue is with compatability - between Psion machines. I have just about every commercial Psion title and many shareware ones, probably an investment several times that of the cost of the machine itself. Is there any way your next offering will be compatable with my old software?

I think Psion make great machines but now face very stiff competition from the pocket PC market, and they have a few problems to (connectivity, support etc). to sort out. Please do not let your position as innovator go down the drain.

Best regards,

- Andrew Price

Answer:

Andrew,

Glad you've been on board for so long, and sorry to hear about your troubles.

There is a piece of software that will sort out your Notes troubles, to the extent that you can take up to 4000 pages of databases with you.

As for the third-party software pieces you've purchased, the only compatibility issues I'm aware of are screen sizings, i.e., the 5mx screen is larger than the Revo. Some of the software manufacturers have rescaled the software for machines and some are providing the changes for users. As Psion just does our core apps and all others are third-party, I'd suggest e-mailing the software authors to find out what their specific policies are. Happy to help, if I can.

Also, what version of PsiWin are you using? 2.3, the latest release, should solve the trouble with your new laptop. The download is free at here at Psion.com.

Thanks for the kind words about Psion devices--we think they're great, too. Your observations about the competition are quite valid, and we're working hard with new releases to turn out innovative product, as ever. Stay tuned!

Canada (1:44pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: I wish that you would market your products to North America. Absolutely no-one (Only slight exaggeration) knows your products here in Canada and they are not available from any retailer here. It was on the web that I "discovered" Psion.

My main concern is that you continue to be a successful company as I have invested a lot of time and money converting all my business computing to my Netbook and Revo. I want continue using your products for years to come.

- zookeeper

Answer:

Zookeeper,

I'm a Canadian myself, and I am regularly stopped and quizzed on the device I'm using. I was in a Future Shop a few weeks ago, and the fellow in the shop didn't believe the product existed ... until I showed him mine and pointed it out to him on the packaging of a CF card they sell.

You can rest assured that Psion will be around for a good long time, and that you need have no fears about support or whether you are going to be abandoned with hardware. It won't happen. We're still supporting handhelds we made nearly fifteen years ago--they work forever, and people don't want to let them out of their hands.

Also, Psion Teklogix, based in Mississauga, is the homebase for Psion's largest operating division. The company handles a lot of industrial products, so you may not have heard of it--but you'll be hearing a lot more about it soon.

Upgrades (1:53pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Grant Rettke is right on in his comments. I'd like to emphasize that Psion must decide which market it's in, just as Apple has had to do. It may be more than one market, in fact, but it can't be many more. I love my 5mx and would love to see it stay in the line, given a color screen, no price increase and promoted like anything for students and techies like me. The NetBook is probably my next purchase, but I hesitate because I see a lack of ongoing improvements, whether in hardware or software, and so worry continually that it will soon be discontinued. It's about everything I need as a mini-laptop, but there's always room for incremental improvement, which I believe would give more creditability to the entire line, especially here in the US.

- Cap Schwartz

Answer:

Cap,

There are plenty of developments with the netBook. So much so that the Malaysian government has ordered 8000 of them to put digital syllabuses and textbooks on, and for students and teachers to communicate with one another and on the Internet. There is an extensive press release on www.pSION.com. Marketing the Psion netBook itself in the US would be pretty expensive, so perhaps a more desirable route might be to OEM netBook in North America. This is a possibility, but nothing has been decided yet.

Leather (1:54pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Oh, yeah, I particularly like the leather touches. Let's have more!

- Cap

Answer:

Cap,

How about leather covered keys? Or a leather frame around the screen? Leather clad cables? Or, hey ... maybe we could ship the whole thing in a leather box! Hmmm, now you see why they kick me out of product development meetings ...

netBook Support (2:10pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: I have a netbook and I've had to send it in twice. It is still in repairs at Psion Teklogix and I won't get it for a month. I think there should be a replacement or loaner program for systems that have been returned twice. I am frustrated because a wonderful device has been hurt by a slow repair policy.

- Don Hoang

Answer:

Don,

We hear you. There has been a lot of discussion about just this, but no conclusion has been reached. The idea is a great one, no question. When we've floated it, however, there are a lot of mixed (and passionate!!) replies from consumers that they don't want to keep a new machine, that they want their OWN one back. Palm used to (don't know if it still does) ship a new unit out to you and keep yours, but you've no idea the logistical nightmare that creates. We've shifted our repair facilities from one place to another, and I suspect you've got caught in switchover logistics--our apologies that your repairs have taken so long.

I can't offer a firm commitment for you, but I can say that the idea is getting a lot of traffic at Psion, and the logistics and practicalities are under debate.

Mac connectivity (2:43pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: And what about a new MacConnect compatible with the new Macs and Office

- FM

Answer:

FM,

As I said earlier, there are a number of software developers in the Psion community working on Mac solutions; we are just waiting for one good enough to endorse.

Marketing (3:11pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Why doesn't Psion do any? I heard ONE radio ad, ONE TIME, just before Christmas about 4 years ago. Never saw a magazine ad.

I had a 3a then replaced with a 3a 2M, then got a Geofox One. I still have them but do find the Palm form more useful.

Quartz should be great, except given past performance, Psion Inc will let it languish on the market.

- Don Hinds

3a/2M, Geofox, Zaurus 3500, HP200LX, Palm IIIc, TRGpro(64M).

Answer:

Don,

Quartz is a reference design, or a pattern for a type of device, not a product in its own right. Quartz will be great because it will be marketed by Symbian, which includes Nokia, Motorola, Panasonic, Ericsson, and Psion.

Licensees of Symbian include Sony, Sanyo, Kenwood, Philips, Siemens ... We would love to market more, but we are smaller than all the companies I have just mentioned, so we need to target our marketing dollars where they will guarantee us the most success. I suspect you're writing from North America, where, as mentioned above, our marketing is limited for several reasons. We do advertise, though--plenty! I was in London recently and saw many (there are well over a hundred, apparently) black cabs plastered with Psion advertising, and on the British Airways flight on the way back I found Psion products available in the on-board catalogue. There is a mountain of advertising going on, but you are quite right in pointing out that there's little in the US.

netBook / Upgrades (5:15pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: The first PDA I actually found useful, and used, was a Palm III. I moved from there to a Revo - which was as much of an upgrade as discovering a PDA could be more than just a toy. I found I used the Revo 'too much' and moved up to a netBook.

I use my netBook every day, and I'd be lost without it.

However, Psion please support your existing customers!

- 1) ER5 IMAP support, still beta.
- 2) netBook Ethernet support, still beta. Apparently the next drivers require an OS update. How about releasing them?

Alternatively, assuming resources are better spent on the current EPOC release, please, please release a version of ER6 for those machines that can be upgraded. I also would be willing to pay for that.

These are great machines, but I regularly face network/email problems from running software that is just not quite finished, and does not appear to be maintained.

Everything else is great - don't spoil it by being lazy!

- Ian

Answer:

Ian,

The set up of an IMAP4 e-mail account is available for download from the Diamond Mako website. Psion does not support this. netBook Ethernet support is coming, honest!

What Next for PSION? (5:18pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: The company I felt had the best POCKET hardware and, most importantly, software and OS was Psion. These machines, to me at least, did not feel like mere PDA's but REAL pocket size computers in their own right. I could process data, word process and access email and the internet from a pocket size device. At the moment I am using a Psion 7, a nice machine, but things are starting to look decidedly dodgy for Psion. Pocket PC devices, the iPAQ for instance, are starting to make Psion machines look decidedly dated. What with TFT displays, USB ports and built in modems, they give even the Netbook a run for it's money. The most annoying thing about this is, Psion don't seem to be doing anything to rectify this. They seem more concerned with the Symbian partnerships, and what devices have appeared FROM those partnerships?

Psion are no longer the pocket computer of choice that they used to be. Even PCW's "PDA & MOBILE DEVICES" section barely give them a mention these days, and no wonder!

When are we going to see a new device from Psion? For me it would be a souped-up, turbo-charged Psion 7(mx?) or even a Psion 9. First a STRONGARM processor running at least 200Mhz, 64Mb of RAM, a TFT display is a must. I want USB, IRDA (If not BLUETOOTH!), PCMCIA and FLASH ports, PLUS a BUILT IN 56K modem. Better connectivity with PC's AND Mac's, and finally, DROP that silly leather cover! (I can also appreciate that the price of the machine would reflect these changes!) The inbuilt software is brilliant.

Much as the 3COM PALM PDA's sell, and deservedly so, there is still a need for a real "mobile computer" NOT a mere P.I.M based, PDA extension to your desktop, but a fully self contained, mobile device. Psion still have it in them to make the perfect MOBILE computer, (As far as I am concerned they have the best pocket OS!) I would hate to see Psion go the way of Apple, who, much as I love Apple computers, no longer really compete.

- John M Coyne, Glasgow

Answer:

Mr. Coyne,

Leave it to the Glaswegian to write such a broad ranging question!

How can you compare an iPAQ and a Psion7--it is like comparing a top of the range bicycle with a motor car. We are working on your wish list, but will only add features that do not over-compromise the price or the battery life. You'll see a new product--yes, Bluetooth--before very long, and I've forwarded your comments to product development. You'll understand that product development is a compromise between what is possible, what is probable, and what is practical.

What Next for PSION (PART 2)? (5:23pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: What's happened to PSION?

I am 32 and have had an avid interest in pocket computer technology for as long as I can remember. I started with Casio FX computers (Basically programmable calculators with no real use in day to day information management) Then Psion released the first organiser and I was blown away! At last, pocket machines with real, practical functionality. Then things started to get better and better, Psion 3, 3a, 3c etc. Since then I have jumped ship a couple of times with the Apple (ahead of it's time?) Newton Messagepad 130 & 2000. The sheer processing muscle of these ARM powered machines attracted me (Let down by the software though!). I fell in love with Psion again with the release of the 5 series. To get to the point, I have owned most commercially available pocket computers, but the company I felt had the best hardware and, most importantly, software and OS was Psion. These machines, to me at least, did not feel like mere PDA's or executive toys, but REAL pocket size computers in their own right. I could process data, word process and access email and the internet from a pocket size device. At the moment I am using a Psion 7, again a nice machine, but things are starting to look decidedly dodgy for Psion. When Windows CE first arrived, it looked like a joke, no competition whatsoever. Now, however things are starting to change. Pocket PC devices, the iPAQ for instance, are starting to make Psion machines look decidedly dated.

What with TFT displays, USB ports and built in modems, they give even the Netbook a run for it's money. The most annoying thing about this is, Psion don't seem to be doing anything to rectify this. They seem more concerned with the Symbian partnerships, and what devices have appeared FROM those partnerships? (Hmmmmm!)

- John M Coyne

Answer:

Mr. Coyne,

Thank you for the e-mail. As you quite rightly point out, PsionDigital has worked hard to produce top-notch handheld computers, not toys. We are working hard on new products, and you'll see some of the fruit of those labours quite soon; so I'd have to vehemently disagree with your comment that we aren't doing anything. As for Symbian, certainly, all the partners in the company take a long view. Symbian is the clear future leader with product developments, but these don't happen overnight. There are products in the market and, as Symbian has stated, there will be quite a few more in the next 18 months. Details of this information are available on Symbian's website.

Part 2

Psion Questions | Psion/Mac | Wish List | Revo's Battery, Angry Consumers | Why not a Psion Quartz option? | Userfriendly and Marketfriendly | Mac/Psion Connectivity | Palm-size form factor? | "Crime and Punishment?" | Backlit Revo | Symbian | Simple Questions | Infrared and Printer Drivers | Psion Suggestions | Support Services | Psion Suggestions--Customer Support | Reliability & Extensibility | Just a Psion customer | Screen Cable | Devices

Psion Questions (6:12pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q:

- 1) Is there any possibility of document conversion software being supplied in ROM on Psion machines (I'm thinking of something like the excellent nConvert from Neuron)? Or do you think people only want to swap documents via PsiWin?
- 2) The HP720 possibly represents the cutting edge of what can be done to a PDA feature / power wise. Why hasn't Psion upgraded the Psion s7? Are you planning anything to compete with the HP720 - similar screen and keyboard size?
- 3) What happened to the netpad? Or are we supposed to have quietly forgotten about that?
- 4) The Nokia 9210 must evoke mixed feelings for you - you must love it because it uses Symbian OS, but people like me will be buying it both as a mobile phone and as a PDA replacement - less business for you. Given Nokia's global marketing power and reputation for hardware excellence, doesn't that alarm you?

- HalBox

Answer:

HalBox,

Better to have it on the CD rather than built into the ROM - software changes so rapidly.

I'm not sure I'm a fan of the HP720's size and shape, but Psion is certainly a fan of HP. I wonder if they would ever consider using EPOC ...

The netpad will be launched this year.

No mixed feelings on the Nokia 9210. It's a fantastic machine. That's what Symbian is all about. Good luck to them.

Psion/Mac (6:35pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: I own a Series 7, and it's a great machine. Used to have a 3a also. The industrial design, interface, reliability, etc. all second to none. But, I'm having to give serious appraisal to switching to Palm because Psion just doesn't support Macs properly. I can't do all the synching/covernsion with Outlook and Office apps that I can with Palms.

My perfect set-up: Series 7, Powerbook Ti for the heavy lifting (graphics and animation work, large spreadsheets, etc), and a EPOC-compatible cellphone that contains minimal PDA functions. (Ericsson R380 may fit this

bill, but nobody in US seems to be selling it yet, and synching with my S7 is unclear...)

Cheers

- ajr

Answer:

Ajr,

As I said earlier, there are a number of software developers in the Psion community working on Mac solutions; we are just waiting for one good enough to endorse.

Wish List (6:46pm EST Fri May 04 2001) Q:

1 - Revo form factor

2 - USB

3 - SD slot

4 - Color screen (or backlit)

5 - Real batteries

Please?

- Erik

Answer:

Erik,

This wins the prize for the most polite e-mail!!!

I'm delighted to pass on the information that some, but not all, of what you wish for will come true shortly. Keep your eyes peeled.

Revo's Battery, angry consumers (9:43pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Hello,

I bought a revo when they came out because of the reliability i have heard of. I loved it so much, up until this month, when it started randomly resetting, deleting all my data in the process. I think the battery is messed up, but to get this fixed it costs 130 dollars? Are you insane? I paid how much money for this, and after a year and a few months i have no other option but to pay up or throw it out? What am i going to do?

- Jon

Answer:

Jon,

I am sorry you are unhappy. We cover all our devices with a manufacturer's warranty for a full year. Many stores, certainly in Europe, offer extended warranty guarantees, which is an option at purchase. It is important to remember that Psions are computers and sometimes (though not often) they do go wrong, underlining the importance of regular back ups. It is simply unfortunate that this has happened to you outside of the lifetime of the manufacturer's warranty.

Why not a Psion Quartz option? (9:48pm EST Fri May 04 2001)

Q: Ms. Miller, thanks for taking our questions. Why hasn't Psion jumped on the opportunity of marketing a Symbian Quartz machine? I love the keyboard of my Revo, but apparently most PDA users like the Palm form factor.

Also, Psion is a sales miracle waiting to happen in USA...if your products are marketed aggressively here. As it's been said before, the average American has heard of Palm and PocketPC, but NOT Psion! Geoworks once had an awesome software platform and OS, but they never advertised and was soon quickly smothered by Microsoft.

Very best wishes to your company.

- Avid Psion Fan

Answer:

Dear Avid Psion Fan,

We did jump on that opportunity, actually, quite hard. Psion had a joint venture with Motorola for a Quartz device which was due to be released right about now. Unfortunately, due to internal difficulties, Motorola had to drop the project. After some hard thought, Psion decided that we could not market the product (PIM + phone) successfully by ourselves, so we closed down the project.

Your thoughts on Psion in the US are interesting, but as one of Psion's strengths is our connectivity to e-mail and the Internet via GSM phones, we don't actively pursue marketing in the US.

Userfriendly and marketfriendly (12:00am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: I am a swedish student who bought my Revo on a recommendation from a friend last august. I will talk about my three recommendations on how to make the Psions better products and how to make them more marketable. But first I will tell you about why I bought a Revo. I had then used a Palm V for five months and was frustrated with the slow input. Servicing my Palm I was given time to consider my situation. Palm has support, lots of software and a large community at my business school. Keyboard, professional programs, wave sounds and all of it with a neat portability made me change my mind.

Why am I telling you all this? Just for you to know why someone buys your product. You have to work on your strengths and you will survive and prosper. Your real competitor at present time is notebooks and PDAs as HP Jornada 720, Nokia 9110 and Ericssons stuff. I think the Revo is better designed than they are and that is good. Look how far Nokia and Apple has got on design. No-one wants sterile computers anymore. Design will be easier to market too. It is not just the productivity tool, but the companion, the everyday cherished gizmo.

But you have to market, market, market...I cant believe how little ads I have seen for you. Business magazines on airplanes worked for Palm. You have to leave the 20% techies mentioned before. Psion could be the next big thing with a focus on marketing. In order to succeed I think you should aim for three goals. These are Customizability, Connectivity and the WOW factor.

Customizeability

For everyone to be happy I think you as all other software and hardware developers should let the user have some leeway. I find the keyboard a bit quirky on the Revo for example. I have to use the function key to write åäö which are very common letters in Swedish. You have two choices here, either create a keyboard for each country or create a system that allows you to change the keyboard within the OS. (which I miss for Windows). The buttons on the bottom of the screen, ie agenda, email, jotter, calc etc should be interchangeable as they are on the Palm. There might show up better internet browsers, PIM programs or calculators. Making them the main programs of your PDA should be easy.

Connectivity

On the PC the connection to your Revo works ok, but not great. What I miss is that if you move 20 .epoc word files to your PC you still have to click ok 20 times to accept convert. There has to be ways to solve this. Palm has its own desktop software which is fairly standard, but fully sufficient. Not everyone is ready to use Outlook. The Psion desktop could be a PIM free to download and a gateway to Psion. Do support Microsoft as good as you can. Office is the main office platform out there. I would love to see support for Powerpoint for lectures etc. Wordart would here be a second wish. I have sketch to maintain some graphics, but it would be great with real wordart. It would work with lectures and as drafting tool as well. This should especially be focus for the bigger netBook, which I think could be developed into a fully switched open drafting board. With soft touchscreen and pencil. This would be perfect for illustrator / webdesigners / advertisers. I bet they would enjoy sitting somewhere more inspiring than the office doing designing.

The WOW-factor

I imagine this, and think - WOW, that could really change how people work. Now this is important if you want to have a brand that is markatable. Peoples attention goes to what is beautiful and has whistles and bells. This is more of an issue for a developed market and for the likes of IPaqs. Still you should stay ahead of Ericsson and HP and you can. You also have to impress the Palm crowd enough to make the transition. This is where you can't have a device without Backlight, you have to have large memory capacity for mp3s and the likes. You need colour screen and volume control and a socket for earplugs! I can't believe you missed that on the netBook. I agree with the wishes of John Coyne if they are feasible. It could make a Psion a real competitor to all portable computers. But you don't only impress people with technology. Real life issues like battery time is another big thing. 12 hours is good, but impressive 25 would be a lot better. This is where it's a lot better to stay ahead than to fall behind. I for my sake don't like AA batteries as some have suggested, but I'd like to have the opportunity to change batteries if they break down or run out, like the mobile phones today. Battery is life, everyday life.

The small program I have got to interact with my mobil, phoneman, is excellent doing both backgrounds and ringtones. I don't know how much shareware there is out there, but you should promote it with your products if you can. Make a CD with the best shareware you find and get permission to send it with each PDA. And make a portal to search for it. Palm where very early with this, and has been blessed with a large developer community which has got them very far without being hardware superior.

I have now talked about three main roads that could change the way we perceive the Psion PDAs. What is important here is to look at the

consumer, give them what they want and impress them. Do that and the history of Psion will take a turn. Ignore it and you will be a company slowing down. A small company with dedicated followers as you are today. One last thing you have to consider in your marketing strategies: the name. It is so simple that it is almost the most important issue. I call my device a Revo. But doing that I don't promote the brand Psion. A netBook is a netbook, but there is a danger giving everything real name. Bringing up the successful competitors one last time, a Palm is always a Palm. I think Revo is a good name, almost more catchy than Psion. So be careful what you make the big name in your ads. Make all coherent. Better stop now or I hackneyed phrases will leap from my mouth.

- Staffan Fladvad

Business student at SSE and webmaster at large

Answer:

Staffan

Excellent e-mail, with some excellent suggestions. I've forwarded your e-mail to both product development and marketing teams at Psion.

Mac/Psion Connectivity (12:33am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: or lack thereof.....

let's see....I have MacConnect but can't install it until I receive my recently purchased Compucable iDock 2 since the G4's don't have a floppy drive or a Mac serial ports....Psion....don't you think it's time to update MacConnect to accommodate us Mac users....the G4's and iMacs have been around for a while you know.....

by the way.....I do love my Psion....BUT IT'S NOT CONNECTED TO ANY COMPUTERS NOW!!!!

- SR

Answer:

SR -

please see the earlier mac comments--we hear you.

Palm-size form factor? (2:35am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: I'm willing to bet the clamshell form factor contributes more to the odd-man-out reputation of Psion devices in the US than any other reason. When will we see a Symbian Quartz handheld, with or without Bluetooth or cellular telephony?

- Gameboy70

Answer:

Gameboy,

As I mentioned above, the first plans we had for Quartz were in the Odin joint project with Motorola, which Motorola withdrew from in getting its own house in order.

So, while I can't comment on when you might see the Quartz form factor, you'll see Bluetooth before long!

"Crime and punishment?" (3:34am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: I share most of the above posted opinions. Especially those dealing with the concerns about Psion being pushed away from the market, just because they seem to be unable to react on upcoming consumer urges in time - which are, at least some of them, brought up by the comparison of Psion and products of all the competitors around... To point out what I mean:

1. The often quoted compatibility...!
2. The limited support for hard- and software
3. Missing possibility to upgrade most of the older products

But still Psion users hold up the flag, and so do I. Because the concept of giving you not just a PIM-device, but a "complete" computer which can be carried around in ones jacket is simply great. And therefore I'm looking for the upcoming devices...

Another wish list:

Size and keyboard of the 5mx, with PCMCIA and CF, colour screen, Bluetooth (more attractive and hopefully more reliable than the infrared port) and USB.

PS: Begging for all the information you are allowed to give about upcoming devices!

Regards,

- Florian N.

Answer:

Florian,

Again, thank you for the excellent suggestions. I think you can piece together from earlier answers which of your wishes are likely to come true sooner and those that will come true later.

Backlit Revo (4:47am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: I agree, as a 5mx owner I couldn't miss the backlit function, I also agree with a lot of things said here:

5mx could do with a better screen contrast, I'd also like a version with a colour screen.

USB for more speed and ease of use in backup and synch.

Expansion of modem and networkcard via PCMCIA (without external device) or CF slot.

Put more software in, consider opera, a wap browser and phonemanpro from zenobyte as this is perfect companion software for GSMs.

- Remko Weijnen

Answer:

Thank you again, Remko, more strong suggestions. Please, all of you, do keep forwarding your suggestions, as they are added to our market research and will certainly be a part of making future product decisions.

Symbian (9:32am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: One simple question:

Will Psion continue to produce well designed, stable OS and useful organizers in the future?

And most important of all, when will we see the next "jewel case"?

- MAD

Answer:

MAD,

I would love to see a limited edition diamond encrusted Psion--so I have fired off my request to product marketing. And of course there will be excellent, well-designed organisers from Psion in the future--we've been at this longer than anyone else and have no intention of stopping now.

Simple Questions (9:37am EST Sat May 05 2001) Q:

1. Why does MacConnect ship on a floppy disk when no Mac ships with a floppy drive?

2. Why don't Psion ship the Revo with an international power adaptor?

3. What's happening with ethernet support for the netbook?

- Brit West

Answer:

Brit West,

Some good questions here. Ethernet support coming--I've seen it working ... just bug crunching now.

The power adaptor is a good idea--will forward to product marketing.

And as for MacConnect, you can rest assured that future versions will ship on CD.

Infrared and printer drivers (10:17am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: Been using psions for 8 years. Just ugraded to a 7 and am so disappointed that it has so few printer drivers and none that work with my epon Stylus colour 760, and why does the IR printing lock up near the end of the last page. Disappointed to lose the bring function the old 3 had as well. How about loading the phone software that the revo has onto the 7.

Although I have had my problems with the 7 corrupting a CF etc. it is still a great machine but needs better support and regular updates to areas of limitation.

Thanks,

- Mark Deppe

Answer:

Mark,

Glad you're a long time user--perhaps we could make a case study of you! Psion printer drivers do not support colour printing via IrDA or cable; but for users of Canon colour printers there is a third-party driver that supports colour printing directly. This is also known to work on the Epson Stylus Colour 760 and can be downloaded from www.googol.net/jump/cgi?ID=1600 -- this is not supported by Psion.

Psion Suggestions (10:58am EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: Like many of the responders above, I've used Psions since the original Series 3, and like many, I'm finding myself in a love-hate relationship with Psion. The Revo/RevoPlus is a great, but imperfect, machine. Hardware wishes for the next generation would include: 1) A RELIABLE POWER SOURCE. 2) Some sort of NON-VOLATILE STORAGE (compact flash or memory stick). The battery crashes would be less frustrating if data were secure, and having one's data on a CF card in one's hotel room would minimize the repercussions of losing one's PDA while away from home. Even the ability to use a CF card reader via serial or IR would be better than the status quo.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, I THINK ALL THE COMMENTS ABOUT LACK OF PROMOTION ARE RIGHT ON TARGET!

PDA's now are not just the hardware & bundled software they're the sum of that, plus all the third-party software & hardware. With Psion's market share being small & dropping, there's no incentive for others to develop for them. Then, prospective buyers see what's available and decide to buy a Palm or Pocket PC machine, & the cycle continues.

AN EXAMPLE: I am a physician. Many colleagues see my Revo & think it's great. Unfortunately, the "killer app" for US MDs is the ironically named "Epocrates". This is available for Palm OS only, so virtually all the MDs/medical students I know are buying Palms/Visors. To be honest, if I didn't have 8 years of data to convert, I'd probably do the same. The Epocrates site states they may eventually support Pocket PC. EPOC doesn't seem to be on their radar screen at all.

Thus, I'd love to see Psion PROMOTE ITS MACHINES MUCH MORE AGGRESSIVELY. Perhaps it could even jump-start the process by striking alliances with some of these third parties (like Epocrates!!!!)

- Jonathan F.

Answer:

Jonathan,

Thanks for your post--it reflects something I've been hearing a fair bit about, recently. We've had feedback from a lot of physicians about just this--the Psions are more capable machines, but the software issue is a problem. We're looking into it now--I'll try to keep Joel posted about developments, but as everything but core apps are third-party developments, perhaps you'd e-mail Epocrates about EPOC as well?

Support Services (12:17pm EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: I, too, have been a Psion user for many years (the 3a, 3c 5 "Classic" and now the 5mx) and my biggest problem is local support.

It seems that the official Psion distributors here in Israel, the Bug Store chain, know absolutely nothing about Psion machines, and while there is a lab in Tel-Aviv, they will not honor guarantees on any machine not purchased from them.

Furthermore, I have been to three of their stores and only one of them had any kind of Psion (the original Revo) and no accessories such as cables or CF disks.

As a result of all this I have had to send two Psion machines by express post (otherwise it takes a year and a day) to England, and order all accessories from English sites through the net.

Why can't we have decent local service?

- ruby z

Answer:

Ruby,

What a convoluted process for you! Try these two local distributors:

Telerom LTD

Web site: <http://www.telerom.co.il/>

eMail: psion@telerom.co.il

Phone no.: + 972+ 9 + 9519518

Bug Multisystem

13 Kineret Street

Bnei Brak

51201

Israel

Psion Suggestions Customer Support (1:11pm EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: My last rant (I promise, sort of):

Psion needs to do a much better job of taking care of those customers it already has. My Revo crashed recently (the notorious battery problem, it turns out). I emailed tech support and the response demonstrated that they had not bothered to read my very short, very direct, query. I then sent the Revo in for repair. About 2 weeks later I got it back, only to have the problem recur about a week later. This sort of thing is totally unacceptable, and seems to be all too common, even allowing for ascertainment bias. I was eventually able to arrange an equitable solution, but this shouldn't have been necessary. Psion ought to have SPEEDY, RELIABLE SERVICE. A LOANER, or ADVANCE RETURN POLICY, such as Palm offers would also be nice. (Also having a Windows Psion emulator, so that one's data would be accessible on one's PC, would be truly useful. There is one in the Symbian SDK--why on earth isn't a version bundled with Psion machines?)

Another example of Psion's cavalier attitude towards its customer base is Psion USA's new Customer Loyalty program. Existing Psion owners can get new Psions for special prices. While \$424 is pretty good for a 5MX, the "special price" for a RevoPlus is \$349. I can pick up Diamond Mako at Amazon.com for \$280, and now at Staples for \$150. I hope you will excuse me if I do not get a warm fuzzy feeling. At worst I get the feeling that we are being taken for a ride at best, that we are being taken for granted. This attitude would be regrettable coming from a company which dominated its

market. It seems downright suicidal coming from a company in Psion's position.

- Jonathan F.

Answer:

Jonathan,

Rant away! Feedback is valuable to us, and we do wade through it all.

We do not set the prices for the Psion. This is a very important point. If some stores are selling Psions at different prices then that's up to them, and it highlights the way different devices are being sold. In Europe, network operators are bundling mobile phones with Psions and the contract is subsidising the cost of the Psions. A Diamond Mako is sold by Sonic Blue, not Psion, so we are even less responsible for that pricing.

Your comments about care of current customers are valid, and I can confirm that various discussions are underway internally about several plans.

Reliability & Extensibility (2:08pm EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: Suggestions:

1) a more robust device with better connectivity and conversion to other file formats.

2) An add port similar to the Handspring Springboards so that I can have more flexibility and extensibility in how I use take advantage of the EPOC operating system.

- Tal

Answer:

Tal,

Thank you for some excellent suggestions. Product marketing will be busy!!

Just a Psion customer (2:31pm EST Sat May 05 2001)

Q: Hello Patricia

Congratulations to Software- and Hardware-designers, production and you. There is no other PDA than Psion I can really use to organize me:

*Great keyboard (I need it, because I have more than just a pen: up to ten fingers!)

*Best size with such a keyboard (Serie 5)

*Great Operating-System (I confide my personal data to a really stable OS)

*Great built-in applications

*Long battery life and especially changeable on Serie 5.

**But beware: I open and close my Psion 5mx at least 20 times a day... and please keep clean finger-nails in the future:)

Don't forget about us customers...

- Lorenz

Answer:

Hello, Lorenz,

Thank you for your kind comments--they are appreciated. You sound like exactly the sort of user we are developing for.

Screen cable (3:30am EST Sun May 06 2001)

Q: I love my PSION. Used to own a Series 3a until my screen cable broke. Since one has to replace the entire screen it became a little too expensive to repair. Now I own a MC218. I love it. It is everything in a PSION I always wanted. No other PDA really matches up. The only thing that still worries me a little is the screen cable. I still find worrying reports on the Internet concerning broken screen cables. Even if this type of cable is necessary, wouldn't it be better if we could simply replace the cable instead of a whole screen? Is this an issue that PSION is looking at?

- Ronnie Boelema

Answer:

Ronnie,

The MC218 is a terrific product. I think you'll find that technology advanced quite a bit between the 3 Series products and those upon which the MC218 is based, and you shouldn't have troubles.

In moving between screen technologies we always make the best decisions we can, but as stated above, product design is all about compromise. Information has to get to the screen somehow, and that is through a cable.

Devices (8:54am EST Sun May 06 2001) Q: When are the devices coming out?

- bob

Answer:

Bob,

Soon, soon, soon! Psion never talks about products ages before their release--we aren't big on vapourware. You'll begin hearing about a new product quite soon, and you'll see it shortly thereafter.

Part 3

Buyer's Remorse | Bluetooth for 5mx | What Psion needs to do to survive | Marketing & Dev Support | Mobility | Psion Products | Alarms | Changing Times | Mac Support/Strategy | SyncML | Revo Form Factor Backlight | New Smaller Device | Series 5mxPro Battery Consumption | Listen to Us | Ethernet | Psion 3, 5, and Mac | Ethernet II | No product suggestions here | Constitutes news | Upgradability | Connectivity and Germany | The Road Not Taken | Poor HR Department | ER6/New Devices/Education Sector | Pick up the Pace | Previous statements | Connectivity and Upgrades | Serial Port | Suggestions for new Psion 5mx | A few problematic issues | It seems to me | Already Answered?

Buyer's Remorse (1:37am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: The netBook ethernet driver was promised for "Q2 2000." It's now a year later. Where is it?! Why has there been no word about upgrading Java 1.1.4? Sun has deprecated that version already. Why does the email client assume the user has a dialup Internet account? I want to check my email from the LAN, as I'm sure many others do. Will there ever be an upgrade to the OS?

- Sadly Disappointed

Answer:

Sadly,

The netBook Ethernet driver is in an advanced state of testing and should be available in the near future. The Java question should really be aimed at Symbian. The Symbian operating system version 6.1 is currently being licenced by Psion.

Bluetooth for 5mx (4:39am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Are there any plans releasing a BT CP card + BT stack for Psion 5mx pro?

- Gerhard

Answer:

Gerhard,

Psion is determined to be a major player in the Bluetooth arena and has extensive plans for the range in this area. We will shortly be releasing the Bluetooth Gold Card and Bluetooth USB unit.

This is what Psion needs to do to survive (5:26am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Psion simply needs to do a few things to be successful.

1. Marketing
2. Continue to primarily support GSM since it is such a huge market wise and extend support to CDMA.
3. Come out with better hardware.

(Hardware Suggestions:

Reflective Color screen with backlighting (like the iPaq)

Rechargeable batteries or AA/AAA so you have the benefits of recharging at home and the flexibility of std. batteries on the road. (like the new HandEra 330)

5MX form factor with the robustness of the Revo. (The Revo simply seems more solid)

The following Expandability for Revo/5mx form factor:

Flash ROM, MMC/SD and Compact Flash if room (but primarily SD), USB port, Bluetooth with a PC Bluetooth adaptor for syncing / Bundles with bluetooth based 56k modem (for US at least since 90%+ here use modem to connect)

Software:

Good PC syncing software and ability to sync using USB and bluetooth)!!!, Good print drivers for wide array of USB printers, System level keyboard based application toggle (like Windows), Web browsing using bluetooth/PC connection.

- jwalling00

Answer:

jwalling00,

Thanks for your suggestions and opinions. The color screen issue has been covered in the rest of this forum, the short answer being that there is a tradeoff between colour and battery life and price. I am a bit confused by your comments about the form factors--the Series 5mx uses 2xAA batteries. With the Revo we made a different decision. Most of our users seem happy with using AA batteries, which are easily available and the power adaptor in the box makes it easy to work at home--personally I never use the power adapter as I get about 6 weeks heavy use out of 2xAA batteries.

As for the robustness issue we have never had any significant complaints about the lack of robustness of the 5. True story--I've been with this company for well over two years, and the Series 5, then the 5mx, have been my handhelds of choice--I'm a power user! In all that time, I've yet to have one crash, lock up, or anything of the sort. So, at the risk of sounding a bit thick, I'm not sure what you're after here.

We are sticking with CF flash for the foreseeable future although the SD remains under consideration.

Marketing & Dev support (7:07am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Psion targets their products for "Professionell buisness people". And their marketing and service / support aims very closely at those. I think they should not forget that PDA's are also geek-machines, which are bought for having something special and to take with you. They should consider this when doing marketing campaigns.

If you compare the PalmOS platform and the EPOC16/32 one, the biggest plus on the Palm side is the amount of software. So I think it is a good move to give the SDK's away for free but I think it's a bad move that they are Windows only. Since many of the "spare time developers" won't use Windows. Also I found no information on the syncing / data transfer

protocol, which is bad if you want to integrate the EPOC devices on the "other" platforms. (Anyone here for a better Mac integration?).

- yeti

Answer:

Yeti,

I can think of a LOT of comparisons between EPOC and other OSs that have Symbian come out on the upside, but that's likely an argument for another day. Symbian is the company responsible for licensing the software to all of its partners, so this question really should be directed at them. We are, in this case, the messenger. The SDK is available for download from www.symbian.com, and I know Symbian nurtures its development community very well. Perhaps you'd e-mail them with your suggestion about expanding the SDK availability? (For anyone reading this who is baffled by the acronym, an SDK is a software development kit, essentially an "alphabet" for developers to work with in development.)

Mobility (7:50am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: When are you going to produce a pda and a phone and solar charger/powerpack all in one device and not three different lumps? I have a psion 5 but don't use it anymore, I would like a revo and phone together, why should I have to walk around with so many different boxes when one will do. I see me buying an motorola accompli 009 which does it all

- notimpressed

Answer:

Notimpressed -

I've talked elsewhere in this forum about a joint project we were working on with Motorola. The project was codenamed Odin. Due to Motorola's decision to get their own house in order, they backed out of the project, which would have been releasing product right about now. After a hard look at ourselves, we decided that we couldn't market the project successfully on our own, and shut it down. Your thoughts about a "one box solution" vs. a "two box solution" fit in well with discussions that are going on within Psion, and I'm quite certain going on in the offices of all the players in this space. You'd be surprised at how passionate the sides are on this one--you clearly see yourself as a "one box" user, while I am, for various reasons, a passionate "two box" user.

Psion Products (7:53am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Have been a Psion user for several years (5, 5x, Revo, Series 7, but had to give it up with the never completed often promised upgrades to Win2000 support. Could not get it to work, support could not, and offered no options. In addition, the looonnggg time without significant product offerings are killing any chance of acceptance in the US IMHO. That said, I would look at a new product if offered in next few months that had color, ER 6, expandability, and under 5 ounces, and robust, supported, sync capability with Win2000.

- narthus

Answer:

Narthus,

We have got some new products appearing later this year which we can't discuss quite yet, beyond saying the PDA product is Bluetooth-enabled.

Alarms (8:25am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Ho Patricia,

I come from the Newton platform and must say I'm quite pleased with the Psion 5mx pro. However there are 3 things i have grown used to on the Newton that I really like to see on the psion:

- 1) Alarms continue until the batterie is dead. I'd like to have it stopped after a certain time which I can configure.
- 2) When the alarms shown I can put it to sleep (come back in 10 min), but the alarm window does not disappear, so I cannot continue with my work.
- 3) I need a List Manager like the Notion List Manager (Newton) for the Psion. It can create templates of lists, accumulate amounts, allows management of several lists at a time, etc.

Is there any way to get that done, especially the first two topics (the third I currently programming but still on the roots).

thanx for your attention,

- Guido Eiben

Answer:

Guido,

I've forwarded your alarm question to engineering. They came back to me saying that currently there is no way to set the alarm to shut off, but that they think the idea is sensible. I have some troubles with this! Presumably, you set an alarm because you need to remember to do something. Seems to me the alarm's job is to make sure it gets your attention and that you do whatever it is. You don't, for instance, set your alarm clock to shut off after a few minutes, do you? No! That's what snooze buttons are for, but they've accomplished the goal of getting you to wake up enough to hit the button--the goal of an alarm. I'd be interested in hearing more of your argument on this, as plainly I'm missing the gist of what you're saying!

Also, regarding your third question--there are several pieces of third-party list manager software available at places like tu cows and five alive (these are websites). Some are shareware and some have to be bought.

Changing Times (9:10am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: PDA's, rather like the mobile phones people are currently trying to connect to them, are no longer the executive toys they once used to be. (Eg in the UK it has gone from 1 in 4 having a mobile in 1999 to 1 in 4 not having one in 2001.) For a company to compete in this scenario they have to cater for all levels of interest. Nokia have done this whereas Ericsson haven't. Palm are doing this (although the m10# models look a bit cheap to me) whereas Psion are not. It is easy to shout that Psion should make there products cheaper but, with the life of a PDA currently about 3-5 years, people are looking more closely at value for money and "legs"...especially if they have to cough up the cash themselves. Psion have too often in the past priced themselves out of the market in which they excell (eg the old MC lap-tops and the Siena) and I cannot see the situation improving as long as people have to pay extra for products and

upgrades (esp. connectivity related ware) which other companies are giving away.

The marketing complaint is also a valid one. I can sit and use my netbook and impress the socks off people (including many university graduates) but a lot of them don't know what it is (you can buy a Netbook in the shops here in Germany more easily than in Britain, apparently) and many don't know who its from.

I can't help thinking that Psion have been just a little bit arrogant in the past thinking that because there machines are so desirable that people won't mind forking out more money for extras, upgrades, and extortionately priced telephone help and that word of mouth will replace advertising. It may have been like that in the early nineties but times seem to have changed somewhat.

- Johnny

Answer:

Johnny,

Thanks for a long and thorough comment. I'd have to respond by saying that I don't consider us to have been arrogant--as I've mentioned before in this forum, we are not a giant company with unlimited marketing dollars, and we have to be careful that what we do spend gets us the biggest bang for our buck, as it were. We *do* advertise, but we do so within informed marketplaces, as we are dealing with high-end users, not impulse buyers who want the latest toy. We don't make toys, or "me too" products. We have learned over the years, as well, that advertising is much less effective than word of mouth and strong editorial support of our products.

Mac Support/Strategy (9:55am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Observations and Suggestion from a North American perspective:

Psion's digital/handheld division could OWN the Macintosh market if they really wanted to. All that is necessary is some decent interface software(NOT the insulting and overpriced "MacConnect"), and a little fundamental targeted marketing.

The Revo/Revo Plus/5mx line are a natural match with the entire line of Macintosh products. While the Windows market is generally more concerned with bottom line unit cost than with product quality and refinement (Dell...Palm...), the Macintosh market has demonstrated a willingness to pay a premium for the quality product. The only thing missing is the....the PSION software that sufficiently marries this handsome couple (iBook + Revo Plus...).

Rather than endlessly pandering to the largely indifferent Windows market, who ultimately snubs Psion in favor of Palm or Pocket PC anyway, why doesn't Psion court the relatively smaller (but still quite lucrative and relevant) Mac market, whom Psion has essentially been CHASING AWAY TO THE PALM PLATFORM for years?!!

- Brian McNulty

Answer:

Dear Brian,

As per the Mac position, I've admitted that we've failed Mac users elsewhere in the forum. Are you guys reading this stuff, or are you taking delight in rubbing my nose in this? :) On the upside, though, Brian, you make an articulate argument for the Mac community, and I've put together a (now getting quite large) document that I'll send on--the more we hear from you, the more convincing it is that this is important to the Mac community.

Mac Support/Strategy (Cont) (9:56am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: I work within a Mac-based industry. My associates all own home computers (Mac), handhelds, cell phones, etc. They generally own Handspring Visor's.

Why? Part of Handspring's product launch was the repeated assurance that the Visor is Mac-ready out of the box (nothing since the Newton had been). Visors are very nice. But they are not true computers, as the Psion line is. When I pull out my Series 3C (Psion's 1996 technology), my colleagues are blown away. When I describe the 3C's multitasking and functionality, they are ready to ditch their new Visors. When I describe to them how I had to fudge some O.O.P. software (PSIMac) and purchase an additional USB adapter (\$80 USD) to make the Psion work with my Mac (somewhat), they look puzzled. When I describe the NEWER title (MacConnect) which works with the newer Psions, they think that I'm crazy for sticking with a product which has offered such token (and expensive) support for the Mac platform. Word of mouth comes through, Psion Mac support chokes.

- Brian McNulty

Answer:

Oh, Brian, no matter how many times you say this stuff, my answer is still going to be the same. I do pledge to keep Joel on top of developments, though--and if you happen to take it into your head to get a petition of Mac users going, I'd be happy to add fuel to the fire!

Mac Support/Strategy (cont) (9:57am EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: So here is my wish list:

1) Release comprehensive Macintosh software asap (I'm dying to ditch my 3c and start using my Revo Plus). It should offer the same features as PSIWin. It should support USB. It should ship on CDROM. It should be offered as a free download, as well as shipping with all Psion products. Do this soon as we grow impatient, and I can assure you that delay is already costing you thousands of loyal Psion users who are retreating to the Palm platform on this issue alone.

2) Backlight the Revo display. I feel that this is more important than color, and when you need it, you need it.

3) Re-vamp the North-American marketing strategy. The Psion brand is a strong and proud one, but nearly silent in North America. Position the product line two ways: As a stand-alone option for handheld, mobile computing (7, 5mx), and as the perfect companion to the Macintosh line (Revo+, 5mx). Secure shelf position in the new Apple Retail stores which will soon be opening across the USA. Secure a hyperlink with the Apple online store. Perhaps some broadcast. Perhaps some print.

Plant these seeds. Watch the forrest grow.

- Brian McNulty

Answer:

Hello again, Brian,

All these issues have been addressed elsewhere

SyncML? (1:43pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Are Psion just waiting for SyncML to become a standard, rather than bothering to update the Mac Connect stuff ? If so when is SyncML going to hit the streets ?

- Anon

Answer:

Anon,

SynchML will be on the streets next year.

REVO Form Factor Backlight (2:23pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: -KEEP the REVO formfactor/Clam-shell.

(Have Jogdial for One hand use)

(Touchscreen in addition)

-BACKLITE A MUST !

-CHANGEABLE and rechargeable BATTERIES.

-Support the MICRODRIVE 1GB.

-ADVERTISE Add some gimmic Keep the good OS and software.

- Copy the expansion capabilty and battery concept from Handera

- RevoWannaBE

Answer:

Revowannabe,

I'm assuming this is a wish list? We're glad you like the form factor--our market research reflects that it has hit a sweet spot. I've covered the backlight and battery issues elsewhere. The Microdrive is a good idea, and I've passed it on; the only problem that occurs to me off the top of my head with that is that our machines are pretty drop-and-abuse proof, and in my experience, while being a BRILLIANT product, the Microdrives, naturally, aren't as robust. As for your comments about adding a gimmick, why on earth would we do that? The market for PDAs is largely a focused and aware one. Advertising often works better for impulse buy products or ones where the buyer has no particular loyalty. Having said that, we do advertise but we have no intention of adding gimmicks just to sell more. Thats what the other guys do--we make serious tools, not toys.

New Smaller Device (2:46pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: If you want to beat Palm At their game, then consider what PIMs are about: A Revo for computing and a REX PCMCIA clip on or push in for PIM.

{Mark my word... The Motorola Startac will cover into the PIM of the future}

1. Take it with you everywhere. (The only functional PIM I own is a watch I wear on my hand to weddings or out jogging.) Take a look at NEW Motorola Startac V60c Clip it to your belt and wear everywhere.
2. Must "vibrate" for alarms while you are praying in church.
3. Screen Must be readable under all conditions.
4. Power source must be available always. {Solar Cells are now POWERFUL enough as auxiliary, or get battery at a local shop}.

MY ideal device?. A functional PIM that cradles into a more functional PDA, That cradles into a LAPTOP. Take 'em all with you or take just the smallest common denominator.

Need seamless integration for different levels

Examples abound but not yet fully implemented.

E.G. A HP720 with a REX 6000.

E.G A Motorola Startac with an add-on organizer.

There is a magical combination there somewhere !

- Ranting&Raving

Answer:

Dear R&R.

As you'll have probably gathered from previous posts, I am not able to discuss what we have in development. But we do take these sort of ideas into account as part of our development process.

Series 5mxPro Battery Consumption (3:04pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Hello Ms. Miller,

First I had a Serie3a and found it was very good. One year ago I bought a new Serie 5mxpro. I use it the most time at the company with a transformer for the electricity but nevertheless I have to change the batteries every month. The Serie 5mx has a consumption of electrical current of 1.5mA when it is switched off. I think that is not normal. The Serie 3a needed only 0.29mA! If the batteries of the 5mx are empty the back-up battery is only good for 5days and then you will lose all information.

Best regards

- Georg Kindel

Answer:

Georg,

It sounds to me like your 5mx pro (and for those of you who've never heard of it, they are available only in Germany) has a problem. Will you please get in touch with me directly (through Joel) with more details and I'll see if we can sort out what the trouble is? There will be, of course, a difference in consumption, but this isn't in that range--like a powerful car vs. an economy model, a more powerful 5mx has a greater consumption,

but you should consult your local Psion office if your backup battery lasts only a short time. Send me an e-mail and we'll get to the bottom of this.

Listen to us I (3:59pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: Being an owner of a Series 5, a netbook, and for 5 days a Diamond Mako (sold at firesale price of \$150 at Staples), I am amazed at the inflexibility, reliance on word of mouth marketing, and glacial mobility of Psion. Being probably the only Psion owner in Minnesota, I wasn't surprised to see that 5 more Mako's sat unsold (for 7 months), while they were backordered on some Palm's and Visors. Whenever I deal with Psion, I feel like I'm dealing with a specialty book seller like the ones you see in London that have maybe ten regular customers and all the purchases are hand wrapped in brown paper and twine. You're liable to get flattened by the latte pushing mega chain bookstores.

For example, the battery problem on the Revo's should have been handled with the urgency of a automobile recall. The lack of marketing in print and media in the US is reprehensible. The lack of innovation for the netbook, originally sold for upgradability, is laughable. Wonderful though all my Psions are, I feel that I can live with them and use them only because I have a special interest in making them work, but I can't recommend them wholeheartedly to neophytes because I know that most won't be able to circumvent the glitches and workarounds needed to make these things really work.

- docpark

Answer:

Dear Docpark,

Thank you for your learned criticisms and for being the only Psion user in Minnesota. We are actively investigating the battery issues raised earlier in this forum, and I've covered our position on North American marketing elsewhere in this forum.

We don't see ourselves as a niche marketer but we do think that Psion users are better informed and more business oriented than other users. We don't have the resources to blitz the US with advertising. We use viral marketing and word of mouth to get the products known. Meanwhile we hope to sell another Psion in Minnesota shortly.

Listen to us II (4:00pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: short wish list for the existing machines:

- broader printer driver package
 - powerpoint/presentation capability to go along with my \$110 colourgraphics PCMCIA-VGA card (I'm probably the only US owner of one)
 - OS upgrade to allow for autonumbered lists like endnotes/footnotes/lists
 - on board document translation (full Office compatibility)
 - fix the netbook's microphone
- short list for new devices
- fire the idiots that ran you into the ground -meaning get rid of the tweedy old gentleman with bad teeth who doesn't answer his telephone
 - bluetooth is stillborn. 811 protocol wireless ethernet is the VHS that will survive for the time being. keep IR

- do not give up the keyboard, do not give up the stable OS, adopt only energy efficient screens
- never release a device without at least 8 hours of battery life
- USB connectivity -and drivers for hard drives/pocketZIP
- keep to once a year software/hardware upgrades. Psion vaporware beginning to smell like swamp gas
- docpark

Answer:

Hello again, Docpark,

How are things in Minnesota? The software for your presentations is made by Impatica and is available via the web; check their website for details.

We feel, as do many others, that Bluetooth is anything but stillborn as a technology, and that Bluetooth has an important role alongside other wireless technologies such as 802.11. I suspect your next comment will be that 802.11 and Bluetooth use the same spectrum, but we have demonstrated consistently that the two are capable of working side by side. And certainly the call for both technologies will be varied--for example, 802.11 has too high power consumption for it to be used in cellular phones, for example.

Finally, I've puzzled over your tweedy gentlemen comments. I'm not sure whom you're referring to, and you'll appreciate that as a British-based company it would be a gargantuan task to fire everyone who turned up for work in tweed!

Ethernet (7:18pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: I'm most curious about when the Ethernet drivers will be available for the netbook. They've been promised for over a year. I'm a 5mx owner, but would gladly purchase a netbook if it could connect to the internet via ethernet/broadband. Wirelessly (802.11b), would be even better. That would almost completely free me from my home desktop.

Thanks.

- Michael

Answer:

Michael,

We have been slow with the drivers--fair criticism. I have seen them working, and we are working on final eradication of bugs at the moment. Hope this helps a bit--I'll make it a point to let Joel know as soon as they are released.

Psion 3, 5, and Mac (10:13pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: I have a 3c that I use and I bought a 5mx that is great. I also have a iMac using 9.0.4. Trying to upgrade is frustrating. I can upgrade from to the next level. Can't get any further, because my psion can't find 1.1.

With the 3c, I was able to save spreadsheets in "wks" and "dif". The 5mx only produces "spr" that my Mac doesn't translate.

I bought a new connector for the 5mx to the iMac. The floppy was faulty. I called the company that sold it to me, they told me to go to Psion. Psion

can't replace a faulty disk, go back to the company, or buy a new one from us.

What happened to "good customer relations" ?

- Sandi D.

Answer:

Sandi,

Check the version of MacConnect you are using--you need to be using MacConnect v. 1.2. You can download an upgrade from www.pSION.com/downloads. Now, I'll say in advance that I have no idea why this is so, and before the onslaught arrives, yes, I agree it is deeply weird, but you may need to upgrade to MacConnect 1.1.4 *before* upgrading to 1.2.

Re: Ethernet (11:03pm EST Mon May 07 2001)

Q: The Ethernet drivers are available in beta for the netBook. You can download them from the Psion Teklogix site - go to the partner program and log in.

They work ok... They do definitely cause a few soft resets though. Apparently the newer builds require an OS update. Will that ever happen? :)

I use a Cisco Aironet 340 11Mbps wireless card everyday with mine. It's great. I just wish they would fix the few remaining bug they are well aware exist.

A decent SSH client would be nice for total desktop freedom. The mindterm java implementation is too slow.

- Ian

Answer:

Ian,

We hear you, and I'll be able to provide more information on this soon. I'm not dodging your questions, I simply haven't been able to get you a solid answer yet, and I'm trying hard to be as honest as possible in this forum.

Glad you're having a good experience with the Aironet--it is on my wish list of things to play with in the next while. Along, of course, with another stack of hours in the day to deal with all the great stuff coming out of this forum!!!

No product suggestions here (12:00am EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: dear Psion,

I won't offer you any advice or my thoughts on what I think the latest and greatest "next big thing" should be. Clearly, you haven't a very good track record of making "the last small thing" functional. Scanning through the list of problems listed above, we have non-functional Macintosh software, non or barely functional PC software, late (and pseudo-functional) ethernet drivers for your flagship product (what "net" is the netbook referring to if it can't connect via ethernet), and a host of inconsistencies with the software you offer throughout your entire platform.

I have a Revo. Sure, I could use a backlight. Sure, I could use Bluetooth. I'll tell you this, though--I could use some functional software for the device I have on my desk as I write this. Your new products are going to cost some good money--money that I've already spent on my Revo, as far as I'm concerned.

My suggestion (which is so banal it's rather sad it has to be mentioned) is release products that work. I shouldn't have to buy Neuron's converting software just to have my Revo talk to, well, anything else. I paid \$300 for my Revo, another \$70 for Macintosh software (this is a joke), and about \$100-\$150 in software to fill in the Revo's gaps. I think your product has potential, but unfortunately your company takes a path-of-least-resistance approach to intelligence. It's not as if people's gripes with your products haven't been well publicized. Do you really not listen?

Sadly, it'll take quite a bit of convincing to con me out of another several hundred dollars for one of your products.

- Marco

Answer:

Marco,

Oh dear, there are so many incorrect things in this e-mail that I don't know where to begin.

Marco, what can I say. We don't like to think that we con people into buying our product in a free market economy. Most people buy Psion because it is reliable and it works well. If that were not the case we would not still be here after so many years. I can't even imagine why you purchased a Revo if you required \$150 of software to make it do what you need it to do. We do listen to all criticisms and we act on them when we can. We constantly strive to improve the product range, and as I've mentioned previously there is a matter of compromise with it. There are literally millions of satisfied customers out there and we do try hard to please all the people all the time.

Constitutes news (12:06am EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: It says a lot when one of Symbian's owners (Nokia) say they will actually use Symbian's products that people consider that news. What does that say for the value of Psion's stake in Symbian?

- Bill Kirilov

Answer:

Bill,

What people consider news varies from country to country. In England, if David Beckham gets a haircut it makes the front page of at least three papers. The value of Psion's stake in Symbian is not in question and it's one of our key financial strategies

"Upgradability" (4:15am EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: Hello,

since many years I'm a faithful Psion user, starting with Psion 3, then 3a, Psion 5, and at the moment I'm using a combination of Psion 5mx pro and Psion 7. Those latter machines are easily upgradable since they hold the OS in flash rom.

BUT I have never seen a real upgrade for any Psion machine. Rather slight bugfixes which aren't really worth the pain and sweat while flashing the machine hoping nothing goes wrong. So far I get the impression that each time there is a real improvement of the OS, a new product is launched, and the older machines are forgotten, not even really maintained anymore.

I would be ready to pay for a real and good OS upgrade for my Psion 5mx pro and Psion 7, would Psion mind to provide one? I don't think I'll buy a new product, even if it comes with an improved OS. I just don't want to get the impression to have been lured by upgrade features that never are really used and served.

Oh, a remark on the hardware. The machines are great, but for the lousy ribbon cable that connects the screen. I had to have it replaced in my Psion 5, and I'm really afraid of the day when it will break in my Psion 5mx or Psion 7. It was definitely way too expensive, even though I fought Psion "support" to sell me the screen unit only and do the actual work on my own. Admit that the ribbon cable is a part that wears out during normal use! Make it better replacable! Charge less for repair of that part!

Cheers

- Herbert Kaiser,
Aachen, Germany

Answer:

Herbert,

The early cables that connected the Series 5 were not as good as the ones that we use now. We have had no problems with the newer cables so you can relax about future problems with your 5mx and 7. By the way, the Series 7 does not have flash ROM; that is the netBook.

Connectivity and Germany (4:33am EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: I use a Psion 5 for 3 years now and will not do so in the future. As Psion is not able to deliver synch-tools in the right time to various products and seems not to be able to cooperate with synch-professionals, it makes no sense to use a psion product in the future. Even if the gadget itself is one of the best in the market. But it s not the hardware, but the software that rules the decisions of the potential buyers. And in a mobile world, synchronisation is all about users are talking.

If you ask a groupware or ums-product-developer about the psion/epoc-platform, people just tell you, that they plan to have an interface to palm-os and ce, but not to epoc.

To do the job the right way, psion should have used the ability to flash-upgrade the os on the palm-platform, port all the integrated software on a database-platform like sybase or mysql and would push the market with actual synch- and documentmanagement for actual products. Having a synchtool two years after a desktop-software like outlook 2000 has been released, is simply a shame. That's what developer conferences and sneak previews are about!

Just ignore my article and watch Palm and ce perform on a worse platform and continue like before. That' s the right way to leave the market.

- Rüdiger Gros

Answer:

Rudiger,

We have identified areas in which the Synch tools can be improved and to this end we are working hard to develop new applications which we hope to launch by the end of this year. There is, however, a later Windows-compatible version of PsiWin--version 2.3.2--which is available on our website.

**The Road Not Taken - with apologies to Robert Frost
(4:53am EST Tue May 08 2001)**

Q: Psion has a choice between dealing with things such as MP3 and color - in other words, turning their machines into fashionable toys like the other companies are doing - and developing their products for people like myself who need more and better WORK applications and functions.

I have a gut feeling that Psion will cave in to the "toy" market, but I only hope this will not be at the expense of us serious users. I'd personally like to see more intuitive operations such as scheduling, word processing and data processing, voice commands and anything that makes life easier for the working professional. So far, Psion has been on the right track, even if it has been rather slow in developing new products.

- ruby z

Answer:

Ruby,

Thank you for your comments and concerns. We at Psion are predominantly in the business of selling PDAs to people who want to use them. We are not in the toys and bells and whistles business, and will continue to adopt this core utility as our business model.

Poor HR Department (7:57am EST Thu May 10 2001)

Q: Hi,

I do wonder why your product life cycles are so long. Do you have enough talented engineers ? I know from personal experience that your HR department doesn't bother returning calls and none of my engineer colleagues with pertinent experience have ever had an interview with Psion. Judging by the continuing Revo battery problems maybe you could do with more good engineers or manage the ones you have better.

- Ian Maw

Answer:

Dear Ian,

What company ever has enough talented engineers? We fight for engineers with companies right across the world, and we keep them terribly busy when we find what we want. I've addressed the product life-cycle question elsewhere, and said that it is hard to please everyone all the time; but I'd like to add to that and say something that is partially obvious, but not completely. The whole handheld market is undergoing fundamental changes as it moves from being centred in stand-alone, PC-oriented devices towards online network access devices. With that said, our new product introductions are quite deliberately less frequent than some other companies, but those products we do release are quite different from their

predecessors; thus, we aren't releasing the same product with a small change as a "new" product.

ER6 / New Psion Devices / Education sector (10:15am EST Thu May 10 2001)

Q: Does Psion plan to bring out a Symbian ER6 device anytime soon? I'm thinking of a PDA without integrated telephonic capability, but, utilising the enhancements of Crystal? I figure such a unit might come as a Revo replacement, and 2) a HP720 rival - both sporting Psion's excellent keyboards, color screen, MP3, and Bluetooth. The move to ER6 seems inevitable don't you think?

I'm very happy with my s7 - and Psion's UK servicing (via 'Psion Enterprise' was excellent in my experience) - but I think you have to be very careful to ensure that your products remain tightly competitive.

Lastly...I'm pleased that you're winning education contracts (Malaysia, for example), but shouldn't you do a 'Classroom' version of the netBook which is designed more specifically for school kids and teachers?

- 1) A white keyboard with black lettering is much easier to read!
- 2) Loose the leather - some people don't like cowhide.
- 3) Maybe consider designing a more pen-like stylus which is easier for children to handle? One of your competitors in the Education Sector is Apple ? their new iBook laptop looks pretty impressive.

- Adrian Graham

Answer:

Adrian,

We're pleased you like the Series 7, and also that you've found our service excellent. A classroom version of the netBook is one of many things that have been mentioned in our thinktank, and your comments are being fed into the mix--thank you for offering them.

The leather has been mentioned time and time again by our focus groups, and virtually without exception they like it. The leather is regarded as a strong and "upmarket" character trait for the Series 7.

Come on Psion, pick up the pace - you're losing the race! (9:34am EST Thu May 10 2001)

Q: Hi Patricia, thanks for listening to our questions and concerns. I have been a Psion user for 5 years, and a tireless promoter of your handheld machines to others (resulting in many sales!) But even someone as devoted as myself when it comes to your products, is beginning to lose faith. Here are some things that I think would make your company's handheld division much more successful:

1. FOCUS MORE ON HANDHELDS -- your company started as a handheld company, but it looks like it's turning into a holding company for Teklogix (which really wasn't even your company until last year) and Symbian. Personally, I don't get it -- Symbian is busily improving on an already amazing operating system (EPOC), but your handheld division in DOWNSIZING instead of producing hardware to run the Symbian software!
2. BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO YOUR USER BASE! Your products have a devoted group of "power user" followers, but they feel alienated because

you're not continuing to provide the necessary upgrades to your hardware and software. New users feel alienated because your hardware and software is not always immediately easy to use and sometimes has major bugs (PsiWin anyone? Come on, this product hasn't been significantly upgraded in 2-3 years!). You need to: a) improve your user support resources (telephone, website) b) provide consistent upgrades to hardware and software (you can even charge for some upgrades if you feel it's necessary, but at least provide them)

PRODUCE NEW HARDWARE *NOW*!!! Psion, although its handheld products used to be beyond compare, is dying a slow painful death because it is not updating its hardware line. Personally, I find it excruciating to watch this downward spiral. You need to: a) develop and release new hardware NOW because the competition is outdistancing you b) PREVIEW YOUR PRODUCTS IN THE MARKETPLACE. The days of Psion being tight-lipped about new hardware until the date of release should be OVER. Product pre-marketing and previewing has worked very well for companies like Palm, and would do wonders for restoring the user base's faith in Psion.

A note about new hardware: You should have at least two form factors to take advantage of the whole PDA marketplace. Symbian has some excellent reference designs for both the traditional Psion keyboard based clamshell, and a Palm form-factor device (ie Crystal and Quartz). You've gone to the trouble to make the designs, WHY aren't you producing them? With the excellent EPOC operating system and two good, new machines with these form factors at a reasonable price, Psion could REALLY take over the PDA marketplace.

4. MAKE MORE MANUFACTURING AND SUPPORT PARTNERSHIPS IN NORTH AMERICA. If you want to break into the NA PDA marketplace and feel Psion doesn't have the \$ to do it, make more partnerships like you did with Diamond for the Mako. It would increase your marketplace penetration, increase your user base, which means more developers would want to develop for EPOC (and we would get more products like AvantGO!)

- Psionized in Toronto

Answer:

Toronto,

With all the energy Toronto has been putting into the Olympic bid, I'm pleased you had enough time to write this e-mail! Let's take it point by point.

Psion is wholly committed to the handheld market, but that market is undergoing fundamental changes at the moment. Had our joint project with Motorola not been cancelled, we would have been one of the first companies in the world to market a truly integrated mobile phone-PDA product, true to our innovative roots and reputation. Because of Motorola's withdrawal, that project has been shelved, leaving a gap in our product roadmap. You will, however, be seeing a brand new PDA from us before long.

Making ourselves more accessible to our users is one of the reasons I'm responding to this forum right now, and Psion is taking it seriously. We have just got through a major overhaul of our telephone support team, and the fruits of that improvement should be beginning to appear.

As for being tight lipped, we don't believe in hyping our products long before they are due. From a pragmatic perspective, previewing a product

risks depressing sales of product already in the market--Palm seems to have had some difficulties in this area with the m505. Also, development is a complicated process, and until a release version is settled upon products are evolving like crazy, and there are passionate arguments about what should go in, stay out, be changed, turned around, or painted green.

Form factors. Well, let's see. Shall I be daring here? Psion remains largely committed to the keyboard, but WATCH THIS SPACE!

We do have worldwide manufacturing partnerships, though. For instance, the Revo is made in the Far East! As well, in our recent acquisition of Teklogix (in Mississauga, Canada, btw) we acquired our first North American manufacturing facility.

RE: Dogshit's statements (11:32pm EST Wed May 09 2001)

Q: I had the same problem with my netbook, got RMA from Psion USA and shipped it out to an Alabama address, (I think, or a nearby state) Not England. They sent it back in 5 days with new screen installed.

Statements like yours are a total piss off as they are based on pure speculation and superstition "...I heard it takes months and has to go to England blah blah blah..."

- zookeeper

Answer:

Zookeeper,

Thanks for putting the record straight on Dogshit's comments. You are our lifeblood, and we are doing our best to take care of you. Our primary objective is to keep you working, and we realize that our products almost immediately become as vital to users as their hands. Thanks for your support ... glad we did well!

Connectivity and upgrades (12:27pm EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: I'll be brief:

I'm sorry if this comes over as a little short but watching PSION at the moment is like watching a friend kill themselves slowly with a blunt knife.

1. Stop advertising the IR modem as being compatible with the 7 when you know damn well it isn't.
2. Upgrade the synch software - there's a host of things it can't cope with that EPOC could represent. It's also buggy as hell and frequently only starts sending data after being stopped. You (PSION) don't appear to give a toss about this.
3. Provide upgrades to the EPOC OS to keep it current (IMAP, ethernet etc). Charge us for it! Leverage the H/W you've already sold!
4. Stop thinking like a bunch of eccentric British inventors (who don't appear to even talk to each other) and look at what the competition are providing: Solutions that work and are supported. Even MS has managed it - and they're on their third attempt which means (if history teaches us anything) that their next attempt will be stable, friendly, useful, pervasive and kill the competition.

- Kieron Edwards

Answer:

Kieron,

Well, we're glad you think of us as a friend, anyway, and as I look around the office, I am not seeing anyone keeled over ... well, there's Anthony, but I think that was something he had for lunch.

Your e-mail is a tough one to answer, if only because I'm not able to be as forthcoming as I'd like to be. There is a lot of work going on both at Psion and at Symbian around synchronisation issues, and results from that should see the light of day quite soon. I'm sorry that answer isn't nearly as specific as I know you'd like it to be.

The IR modem is compatible with the Series 7, which uses the same IR as the 5 series products.

And finally, Microsoft is on its sixth attempt at a decent OS in this market. ...

Serial Port (11:24am EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: Please leave the option for a serial port connection for those of us who use the devices as portable terminals for routers and switches, and for those using NT4 which doesn't support USB. Ethernet and Bluetooth would be nice too.

- Nick

Answer:

Nick,

Many people have weighed in with criticisms for us not adopting USB immediately and dumping the good old serial port, but we still think that serial port has some good mileage left in it. Interestingly enough, the hottest new phone in Europe, the Siemens SL45 has--yup--a serial port.

Also, given that Microsoft has some support issues for the USB2 standard in their new XP operating systems, we fully intend to leave the serial option open for the time being. We have also been working extremely hard on Bluetooth, and as I've mentioned elsewhere we'll have something for you sooner than you'd expect. Stay tuned!

Suggestions for the new Psion 5mx (10:48am EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: I have an 5mx for almost 2 years doing heavy office work, carrying it on the field instead of my laptop. However there are a few improvements I would be happy to see in the upcoming 5MX sized device:

1. Quality color screen, with a sensor which turns on/off the backlight automatically in response to ambient light, to save power.
2. Faster USB connectivity instead of the slow serial.
3. Built-in modem with the option of switching it off completely (zero power drain) when not in use, in order to save batteries. When on external power automatically switch modem to and feed it from external power.
4. VGA out connection - full support for presentations via projector.
5. Presentation Maker software included in the EPOC Office suite, preferably in ROM.

6. Much better integration with PC file formats, the possibility to directly save EPOC documents in various, most commonly used PC formats.
7. Filling in the gap of the presently non-existing powerful relational database management. An app as Data with relational database capabilities would make database management much more powerful on the EPOC platform.
8. Multiple spreadsheet support for the built-in Sheet app, with the option of making links between the sheets.
9. Rich text (HTML) support for Message Suite.
10. Flexible importing/exporting options for the messages (emails) in/from Message Suite.
11. Tighter interconnection between the existing built-in apps, possibility to embed not only 4 of the basic apps (Word, Sheet, Record and Sketch) but many more, even installed 3rd party apps.
12. WYSIWYG font management. Supporting and displaying correctly the user installed font types.
13. Some more flexible basic voice editing features for Record, for e.g. being able to cut/paste, copy, delete portions from the middle of a voice recording.
14. Preserving the software compatibility of the new Psion devices with the present apps, softwares.
15. More internal memory, faster processor in one word more power.
16. And why not MP3 or multimedia support as well?

Hope to see some new gadgets coming up in a not very distant future.

- val

Answer:

Val,

Just a few suggestions! Whew! Thanks for the list--let me address what I can, here.

OK, the colour screen is something we hear about all the time. The reality is that colour is a direct trade off against the battery life of a device. We have done extensive research on this, and we've also done a lot of testing of competing devices to find that the core applications don't really benefit from a colour screen. Word processing and spreadsheets gain nothing, essentially, from colour, and it is primarily peripheral things--games, .jpegs, and the like--that make the most use of colour. Don't forget that Psion is not in the business of producing toys--these are business machines for power users. Having said that, though, we're always looking at it, and believe it is an inevitable development when the technology will work within price and power requirements.

The letter right before yours begs us not to dump serial connectors for USB--you can see what sort of a position we're in there!

The modem is difficult from a technical perspective, not least because of the differing requirements for each market. We still maintain that a product like the IR modem gives users versatility not available anywhere else.

The name of the game in this business is real estate--how to satisfy as many people with features that have to be shoved into a really small

space. Lots of projector manufacturers are currently working on Bluetooth-enabled projectors, so the fix you suggest would be short term in view of that development process.

As for the other stuff you've mentioned, we are working all the time to develop and improve the product. No doubt you'll see some of the other things you're looking for.

The MP3 one I disagree with. Earlier in this forum I commented that I did some testing of an iPAQ, and that the MP3 function left my battery dead in about 20 minutes, so to me MP3s are a pricey way of using battery power at the expense of my core functionality. I've carried an MP3 player for ages, and it isn't life or death if the battery dies. If my 5mx croaks, though, I'm in a bad way.

A few problematic issues (12:44pm EST Tue May 08 2001)

Q: First I would like to say that I love revo plus.

I've owned it for about two months now and I enjoy working with it and encountered no software problems.

The problems are as follows:

1. Battery!!!!!!

This is very painful. You can't leave it on to simply charge - cause it overcharges and eventually the battery holds only 3-4 hours of charge!!!

What is that suppose to be? - Just to make things more clear : you can leave your Cellular phone to charge for hours with no harm done to the batteries. actually you don't even think about the batteries.

The batteries issue is a very serious one - I'm almost sorry I didn't buy Palm Vx which hold for weeks and has no recharging problems.

2. Back light.

Mainly a matter of convenience but it would be very nice to have

3. color.

Again mainly nice to have.

4. CPU.

It takes too long to open even small files such as my 100 contacts list. The next generation must be much much much more powerful.

5. Expansion.

It's a shame there is no expansion such as network cards or plug in modems - You should be able to walk around with you PDA and place it neatly on a table in order to do something. Memory cards, for backup for instance, are missed too.

I hope this is helpful and I hope Psion won't stop making Palmtops - I Love This Form Factor.

Best Regards

- Eran Amit

Answer:

Eran,

First off, thanks for the vote of confidence on the Revo--lots of people couldn't do without them. The backlight comment is one we have received loud and clear. As for the battery problem, as I mentioned earlier, we are actively investigating this. I have promised earlier that I will let Joel know as soon as we have answers--I'm not dodging this question, but I can only give you information that I have.

Expansion is a thorny issue. Our position is that Bluetooth-enabled devices are going to make short work of that, and we are looking forward to letting you in on some developments quite soon. I am especially looking forward to it, as Joel, scoop-master that he is, asks me just about every morning if I'm going to tell him anything. He occasionally tries to trick information out of me, but I'm wise to him now!

It seems to me... (11:30am EST Wed May 09 2001)

Q: That nothing has changed at Psion. They make the same mistakes over and over again. Psion seem incapable of learning from their mistakes in the past. PsiWin has always been a thorn in users side, but still it doesn't seem to have improved. Quality of build issues, marketing in the US, e-mail, upgrades, the list goes on. It wasn't until Symbian took control of EPOC that the development kit was made free (other issues on that).

IMHO I can see Psion being a holding company just collecting income from Symbian within 2 years. It's a shame, but I think we are seeing the death throws of Psion.

- Darren Christie

Answer:

Darren,

I wouldn't gamble on a death just yet. Psion owns Symbian as an investment into future technologies. We also own Psion Teklogix and Psion Digital. I wouldn't expect to see us as a holding company any time soon, as some of our future developments will make quite plain.

Already Answered? (5:12pm EST Wed May 09 2001)

Q: So are the answers going to come after the end of the question period, or will people have a chance to respond to the answers and pose counter-questions?

It would be unspeakably weak for them not to offer any chance for follow-ups.

- Jeff

Answer:

Jeff,

There is room for answering and counter questions, of course. I should point out here that we're going as fast as we can--I'm not fielding all these questions singlehandedly. Things I don't know the answer to I'm sending on to those within Psion who will know the answer, and all of that takes a bit of time. We're doing our best to be honest, and as forthcoming as we can possibly be, here--we're not trotting out glib answers.