

Ten O'Clock Tech

Finally, BlackBerries Speak Macintosh

Arik Hesseldahl, 02.28.05, 10:00 AM ET

It's a tortured life loving two computing systems that don't play nice together.

Long have I loved my many Apple Computer (nasdaq: AAPL — news — people) PowerMac and PowerBook. I've used a Mac about as long as there has been a Mac. PCs running Microsoft's (nasdaq: MSFT — news — people) Windows have always been something I've been forced to use on the job.



A screen shot from PocketMac Blackberry.

Because they supported both Mac and Windows, various Palm OS-based devices were the natural choice for exploring handheld computing. My devotion to the Palm platform, now the main product of PalmSource (nasdaq: PSRC — news — people) and handhelds from palmOne (nasdaq: PLMO — news — people) and its various predecessor companies was almost as strong as was my devotion to the Mac.

That changed when I first played with the BlackBerry devices from Research In Motion (nasdaq: RIMM — news — people). My BlackBerry 957 connected to the office mail server and allowed me catch up on the morning e-mail deluge while on my way to work. I still carried a Palm handheld for scheduling and contacts even though the BlackBerry could handle those functions just fine. Old habits die hard.

This went on for two years until I got my very own BlackBerry 7230. For me the time had come to break the Palm habit. But there was one significant problem: BlackBerries don't talk to the Mac.

I whined about this oversight to both of RIM's CEOs James Balsillie and Mike Lazaridis and a room full of Apple execs demonstrating their iSync software for the first time.

But finally there is a program that gets the Mac and the BlackBerry together. It's called PocketMac BlackBerry, and it comes from the folks who created the first software to let Microsoft's Pocket PCs talk to Macs.

At the outset I should say I like this program despite one gigantic oversight: It doesn't sync e-mail between the BlackBerry and the Mac. At least not yet. I'm told that a forthcoming release expected later this year will address this rather elemental function of the BlackBerry and will likely work with Microsoft's Entourage and Apple's e-mail program, Mail.

It's not necessarily a deal-breaker. RIM's e-mail servers allow you to automatically send a copy of every message you send from your handheld to any e-mail address of your choosing where it can be stored.

But there are other limitations. The program works with Apple's iCal, its calendar and scheduling software, which is fully compatible with Palm devices provided you install the necessary extra software. One of the best features of iCal is that it lets you classify and label certain events by category such as "work" and "family" and so on.

PocketMac doesn't support those categories, but instead adds one of its own. If you want an iCal appointment to show up on the BlackBerry, it has to be added under the "PocketMac" category. I had smoother results using Entourage, the version of Microsoft Outlook for the Mac. It also works with Now Contact and Now Up-To-Date, though I didn't try it with those applications.

One feature I liked was the syncing of "notes" from the BlackBerry to the Mac. I use this mostly to take down phone numbers or new addresses when I meet people. I like how PocketMac syncs the notes with the Mac application Stickies, which emulates the behavior of paper Post-It notes. When you write a note on the BlackBerry, it pops up directly on your Mac desktop in Stickies, where you can decide what to do with the information right away so it's not forgotten.

PocketMac BlackBerry sells for \$30 and can be downloaded from PocketMac.com. It supports nearly every BlackBerry device going back to the 957—some older models require a special serial port attachment—as well as the newest phone-like handhelds such as the 7100t. I have no problem recommending it, unless of course you absolutely have to have e-mail-syncing capability between your BlackBerry and your Mac, in which case I would advise you to wait until the next version is released.



Copyright © 2005. Reprinted with permission, from Forbes.com, February 28, 2005, by Valeo Intellectual Property, Inc.
For reorders call Valeo IP at 888-VALEOIP.

500394



PocketMac® for BlackBerry
<http://www.pocketmac.net>