

PDA's for everyday use

In these exciting times for mobile data knowing which force has trialed which device could be useful. Dan Worth talked to some leading suppliers and manufacturers to find out more regarding PDA's on the market today.

Research in Motion: the BlackBerry Curve 8310

"Not only can police access databases and be sent images they can also bring up text versions of handbooks. This allows them to look up their rights and the rights of a member of the public before they intervene in a situation. This gives them much greater confidence on the job as they know they are operating within the law," explains Graham Baker, Senior Manager of EMEA Public Sector Sales, Research In Motion.

In the four years since Graham started at RIM the trials of BlackBerry's have increased dramatically as police forces have found the technology suitably advanced to make the implementation of devices worthwhile. "Police forces that have now deployed BlackBerry's are making arrests because of this technology – many that they wouldn't have made before. The BlackBerry has made such an impact because while policing was computerised in the last decade the mobilisation of policing took longer. Now though, the police can do their computer based work on the beat the BlackBerry really is revolutionising policing in the 21st century."

The future of the BlackBerry looks strong within the police and as Graham points out a recent survey of police officers showed that 75 per cent believed their job would be significantly hampered if you took away their BlackBerry's. Ultimately Graham is in no doubt as to why the BlackBerry has been successful: "Police officers join up because they want to make a difference – not to fill in forms. The BlackBerry allows them to do this and is really changing policing on the front line."



Weight: 111g.
Size: 107x60x15.5 mm.
Battery life: Four hours
talk time, 408 hours
standby.

Orange PDA Feature HTC P6500

Orange have been supplying several forces, including the Met, with a PDA device that has a larger screen than the standard BlackBerry as well as fingerprint security. The HTC P6500 has been trialed by a selection of forces including Cumbria, Leicestershire and Humberside and many are now rolling the device out as standard.

The information infrastructure system on which the devices operate is run through a fixed linked security infrastructure. Mark Owen, Business Development Manager, Public Sector Criminal Division, explains how this works: "We normally only supply PDA devices to a Force in conjunction with one of our secure bearer offerings, an entire end to end package including Private APN's – access point name – bundled data and handset insurance. This means that when deployed as a fully converged solution an officer is assured that his voice or data connection is secure and very cost effective."

Inspector David Braysmith of Humberside Police, who have recently taken the device on board after a trial period, outlines why the device meets so many of their needs:

"We knew the things we wanted in terms of functionality from a PDA and after going through mobile data trials with Orange we thought it made sense to stay with them. We looked at a range of their devices but the P6500 was clearly the ideal one and offered the sorts of things we wanted. To make sure it best suited those using them on the front line we got feedback from them on the trial in terms of data input, functionality, visibility in the sun, size, weight, and other factors and used this to decide on the outcome of the trial."

The result was the uptake of 70 devices for deployment at the end of June, and the plan is to take on more devices over time. The importance of ensuring the right device was chosen is something that Insp Braysmith

noted, "We went through quite a full process with our choice of device and we wanted something that was solid in the hand but still top technology for our officers."



Size: 101 x 50 x 17.7mm



Motorola MTC100 – PDA with TETRA wireless capability

*Size: 55x89x33mm
Weight: 430g.*

Motorola's MTC100 is a PDA that has been specifically designed for use by police officers and so has a tough, ruggedised build quality that means it can withstand the bumps and knocks it will invariably suffer while an officer is on the street.

It is intrinsically waterproof, its screen is strong and it can withstand falls from height, and does not require a case to protect and reinforce it. Iain Ivory from Motorola's Market Development Government & Enterprise Mobility Solutions division explains how the device works: "The MTC100 comes in two options, the Standard and the Enhanced. The enhanced has Wi-Fi and Bluetooth capability as well as TETRA which provides a wide area data bearer, so information captured in the field can be stored on the PDA, uploaded immediately over the TETRA bearer system or synchronized over a secure Wi-Fi connection back at the station. This means officers don't need

to send routine information back from the street but can upload data when they return at the end of a shift."

The PDA was also designed to be as easy to use by officers as possible: "When we first designed the concept we looked at a few design ideas and having a large dominant touch screen was found to be important to make it as easy to use, so we built it around that with just a few simple key buttons for main functions," explains Iain.

The recent government initiative to provide funding to police forces to increase their use of mobile data has meant all mobile data terminal suppliers are hoping to start taking orders for devices soon, once trials reach their conclusions. Motorola have had the device on trial at several forces and Iain says feedback has been very positive and that they hope in a few months' time these devices will be on the streets as a standard piece of kit helping officers on the beat.

BlackBerry 8700

The 1,100 officers equipped with the BlackBerry 8700 smartphones use them to access a range of applications while on the beat.

It enables the officers to increase their visibility in the community and improve their operational response. It also gives officers the power to quickly check details such as identity, vehicle ownership and previous convictions with very little effort and in a secure and robust manner. In addition, remote access to the force's custom-built briefings application provides officers with real-time access to information and photographs of wanted or missing people, helping them to quickly and confidently conduct identifications.

Bedfordshire Police are using BlackBerry smartphones to gain immediate, mobile access to the force's warrants database. As Inspector Jim Hitch explained at the Police Technology Review in March of this year, "This is a completely electronic system that delivers a warrant or image of a suspect or missing person directly to an officer on the beat. Allowing officers to access these systems remotely has enabled officers to increase their efficiency, as they no longer need to return to the station or radio the control room to access information or log their

updates."

Prior to investing in the BlackBerry solution, Bedfordshire Police conducted a pilot in which officers provided feedback on their experiences, issues and any potential problems with the devices. Some of the solutions Bedfordshire Police trialed did not allow for the mobilisation of the computerised systems that they already have in place. With the BlackBerry solution, they were able to do this quickly and easily and this ensured they deployed a solution that front line officers would find useful, useable and practical. And because it is robust and applications can be simply mobilised, front line officers can use it day in, day out.



*Weight: 131g.
Dimensions: 110x69.5x19.5 mm.
Battery Life: Four hours talk time, 16 hours standby.*

O2 XDA Stellar

O2 has wide experience with a number of police forces in ensuring that forces get the most out of their mobile investment in Blackberry and Xda.

For example, with O2's help, West Yorkshire Police has recently deployed Blackberry devices to around 2,000 front line officers.

As Brendan McLaughlin, Police Business Manager from O2 explains, "The key requirements of the new strategy was to ensure that the devices offered the best value for money and that officers were able to make full use of this investment."

After a series of trials and analysis of job roles, Brendan explains that it was clear that



*Weight: 190g.
Dimensions: 59x112x18.6 mm.
Battery Life: up to 4 hours talk time and 350 hours standby.*

the best solution was not a "one size fits all" approach but a mixed deployment of devices.

"Work is underway with West Yorkshire Police to ensure each person gets the most appropriate device and that each officer gets the support and training they need to get the most out of their device, helping to increase job effectiveness."

West Yorkshire Police are now testing the O2 Xda Stellar to allow the viewing, editing and sending of Word and Excel documents on Windows Mobile 6.0 software, with the intention to roll out 1,500 of these devices to officers and staff in the next few months.