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Sony unveils 'PalmPowered' entertainment PDA

Good looking, but pricey

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UPDATED Sony officially launched its Palm-based PDA - or "personal entertainment organiser", as the company calls it - yesterday.



Few details were new, Sony having demo'd the machine at PC Expo earlier this month. The machine - available in two forms, one with a monochrome screen, the PEGS300 and the other a colour device, the PEGS500C - will ship in Japan on 9 September for ¥55,000 (\$510) and ¥60,000 (\$555), respectively. The US launch will follow later in the year.

Both machines come with 8MB RAM, 4MB ROM and run PalmOS 3.5.

The devices' colour scheme matches the silver and blue of Sony's Vaio family of products, the PDA doesn't appear to carry the Vaio brand themselves. Instead, Sony is calling them 'PalmPowered' organisers.

Each machine will bundle a Web browser and "file management software to share information with PCs", said Sony. Whether these are AvantGo and HotSync, or some new apps cooked up by the Japanese company isn't clear. The role of the browser is as much as an image display system as a Web surfing tool. Sony plans to launch a Web-based service called ImageStation to allow PDA users to send and receive still and moving images via the Net. The PDAs can be connected to the Internet via cellphone links.

They can also use Sony's MemoryStick 'solid-state floppy' technology, support for which was added to the PalmOS at Sony's behest. The company said it will launch a range of MemoryStick-based peripherals - under the preliminary name 'Memory Stick Expansion Modules' - next year, including a digital camera interface, a Bluetooth transceiver and a GPS tracking unit.

Sony said it plans to ship 100,000 of the PDAs a month from launch, which the company hopes will propel the to-date uninspiring Japanese PDA market to new heights. While the US and Europe have proven fertile ground for PDA vendors, Japanese consumers have been less

keen, largely because cellphones provide much of the functionality offered by PDAs, said senior Sony managing director Katsumi Ihara.

"With Sony's branding power, we would like to boost people's awareness of handheld devices and create a new market here rather than bracing for competition with others," he said.

Japanese analysts are less confident. "I see a slim chance of the new product of becoming a mega hit in a country where people are getting used to sending e-mails by phones," IBJ Securities analyst Hiroyuki Iba told Reuters. ®

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