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The future of the Palm

Is the Palm going to evolve into a new type of device, or is the technology going to continue to be what it is? What lies on the horizon for PDA devices in general and the Palm in particular?

Palm Source recently (within the last several months) announced that it has acquired China MobileSoft. While a corporate merger usually does not mean much in terms technology, this one will. China MobilSoft has a concentration in the development of embeded Linux. It seems that the next vesion of the Palm OS will be based upon a Linux kernel. This won't mean a lot to the end user, but it will mean a heck of a lot to Palm and other developers. The Linux kernel is on the verge of becoming what mobile telephone technology has become,... everywhere and hot. For a touch of what future Palm devices can become, one only has to look to the Sharp Zaurus. The Zaurus is the "it" PDA for the geek set. It is infinitely customizable. It can be everything from a smart terminal to a telephone, essentially it is a pocket dekstop computer. It is not surprising, considering that most PDAs have more processing power than desktop machines had a few generations ago. I currently use a Palm m130, an out-of-date PDA by any estimation. Yet the device is still very versatile. I can word process on it, do spreadsheets, play games, and,... oh, yes, check and update my schedule and monitor contacts. It is because of the ability to download programs that this is so. As memory gets bigger, and processors get more capable, the usefulness of the devices only get greater. There are those who have predicted that Palm-style PDA devices will get marginalized as technology improves. I see quite the opposite. In fact, the Palm Treo is just another example of how the integration of new technologies impoves the PDA devices. The Treo line is a full featured PDA line with cell phone technology built right in. While a little bulky for those who just want a cell phone, the Treos are perfect for those who carry around both a cell and a PDA. What is on the horizon? I predict simple voice recognition on future models as the power of the devices approaches the power of desktop machines (for those who scoff, remember that the Palm devices had the best, practical handwriting recognition system at their early stages, in their simple shorthand system). I predict broadband wireless internet access. And I predict that anything less than a Linux kernel will subject the machines to the kind of security nightmare that is MicroSoft Windows XP. I predict that laptop computers will be continue to be mobile desktop alternatives, but that true computing portability will be with the next generation or two of PDA devices.

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