

## **Trēo 650 – Much More Than a Simple Gadget**

A couple of months ago, my cell phone/Palm Pilot, Kyocera 7135, finally lost its usefulness for me. I certainly played an important part in that by dropping it a couple of times. After the last time it plunked to the ground, it frequently reverted to the start up routine, requiring me to tap the screen in designated places until the screen could be configured. The time period for screen configuration became longer and longer and eventually unbearable. It certainly could not be relied on to make an emergency call. The Kyocera had served me very well, but it could not withstand my abuse. Unfortunately, I did not obtain an extended warranty, and I was told that it could not be fixed.

I found the combination cell/Palm to be really useful. I was able to keep my company's entire list of more than 3,000 contacts and all of my calendar information on the device without a serious dent in the 16-megabyte memory. It was very easy to quickly call anyone on the contact list. I could also easily add to the contact list and calendar while out of the office, do synchronization upon my return to the office to update the office system with my new entries and update the Kyocera with the new records added by others in the office while I was out. I definitely did not want to lose this functionality.

From my research, there appeared to be three categories of the combination cell phone and personal digital assistant ("PDA"). I will call this combination a "smart phone" which appears to be a name people in the industry use. One is a phone with a Palm operating system, another is a phone with a Windows Mobile system and the third is a Blackberry. Because I have been using Palm systems for quite some time, my tendency was to select the Palm category. This was also consistent with what I had been hearing and reading on the merits of the available smart phones.

I concluded the best replacement at the time for me was the Palm Trēo 650. It is expensive (it currently list at \$399), but at least I was entitled to a \$100 discount with Verizon's two-year replacement policy.

### **No Graffiti**

When I was just about to purchase the 650, one additional question I asked the sales representative almost reversed my decision. I noticed there was not the usual separate screen to write in Palm Graffiti. How could a Palm be a Palm without Graffiti? I had become pretty proficient with Graffiti with my Kyocera and the Palm IIIc I had before that. The salesman convinced me that the built in mini keyboard, which is to be used with the pads of your thumbs, is actually more efficient. The keyboard is somewhat similar to that on a Blackberry (although I understand that the Blackberry makes typing a bit easier). Well, it seemed reasonable, and with the raves I heard about the 650, I took the plunge, particularly after being advised that I could use the 650 as a semi broadband modem for my laptop. This feature was enticing since you can get an Internet connection anywhere you have cell phone service (although I believe if you are in a roaming area

being provided service by another cell phone company, its system might not have the necessary data capabilities).

After a few days, I didn't miss Graffiti at all. The salesman was correct. The keyboard is more efficient, at least for me. I could do everything I could do on the Kyocera plus more.

### **Ratings**

I checked reviews on the Internet at ZdNet.com. The 650 and the Samsung SCH-i730 were the highest rated "smart phone" devices. The Samsung is a Windows Mobile-based phone. For those who prefer a Windows operating system to the one by Palm, the SCH-i730 will probably be their choice. As a matter of fact, the ZdNet review refers to the SCH-i730 as being in the running as the "Treo killer". One major advantage the SCH-i730 has over the 650 is built-in Wi-Fi. The SCH-i730 has more memory and appears to have a faster processor than the 650, but the SCH-i730 has a lower resolution screen and currently does not have a built-in camera (neither does the Blackberry). The Blackberry 7750 was rated slightly lower. It was mentioned that if you do not want all of the electronic bells and whistles and simply desire a good smart phone that provides excellent access to email, then the Blackberry is a good choice. I suggest you look at the ZdNet reviews to get full details. Look for "Editor's Top Handhelds" or "Editors Top Cell Phones" and then click on "Smart Phones".

Below I discuss many features of the 650 that I have used. Most of them are also available on the Windows Mobile and Blackberry products as well. Where I know that feature is not available on a product, I point that out. Even though you might prefer the Windows product or the Blackberry, the following discussion should be helpful as a checklist for features when considering any model within the three categories of smart phones.

### **Data Services**

A big advantage for the 650 are the data services, primarily email, web browsing and use of the 650 as a PC modem for a low-end high-speed Internet connection. To use these data services you need to pay for the data service. The cost is similar to paying for a broadband DSL or cable connection for a PC to get unlimited data service. You can select a plan to use a specified limited amount of data transfer, but without an unlimited plan you run the risk of a really large bill if you get or send many email messages, do a good deal of web browsing or use the 650 as a PC modem. If you do not plan to use at least one of the data services, I think it does not make sense to get the 650 or a Blackberry or the top of the line Windows smart phones. There are less expensive alternatives.

My unlimited data service started out at \$45 per month. It actually dropped down to \$30 per month when I upgraded my cell phone-calling plan to 1,350 minutes per month. In any event, this is not a toy, and you should only consider a 650 if you will really have use

for the data services with its monthly fee. Based on my discussions with sales representatives, I am pretty sure the data fees from Verizon (I am talking only about Verizon because it is my provider – I imagine that the other providers have competitive plans – possibly better plans) are the same for the Blackberry and the Windows Mobile smart phones.

A negative feature of the data services with the 650 is the inability to receive a phone call when the data services are being used. The same is apparently true of the SCH-i730, but Verizon has advised me that the Blackberry can handle phone calls at the same time data is being transmitted. With the 650 and SCH-i730, the caller can leave you a voice mail. I must admit it is annoying to see that I have received a voice mail when I have been in a good reception area during the time the call was made. Some may view this as a benefit, but it is clearly a disadvantage in comparison to the Blackberry. I am a little surprised that the 650 does not have a call waiting notification while using data services (at least I have not noticed any).

### **Email**

You have the ability to monitor multiple email accounts. I currently have four email accounts feed into the 650. There are many options for configuring each email account on the 650. You can elect to have the entire message delivered or just the subject line (and then determine if you want to see more). You can also have the 650 retrieve only previously unread messages if you prefer. You can limit how much of a message will be retrieved in number of kilobytes. My setting is currently at 10k. If you want to see more after reading the first 10k, you can tap on an icon to retrieve the balance. You can also select to download attachments automatically or by choice, which is my current setting. There is also an option to receive the message in html or plain text.

There are various display options including whether to display a reference to each message in the email list for the account in 1 or 2 lines, the font to be used, the field to sort on and the ability for the items in the list of emails to be in different colors depending on whether the message has already been read.

You can set the 650 to check for new email at various intervals from every 5 minutes to every 12 hours, and you can limit the checking to certain days and for only certain parts of the day. My setting is currently to check for email once every hour between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM. for every day during the week. Some people may prefer to turnoff email checking during he weekend. I originally, set the interval for every 15 minutes, but the frequent checks with the email servers interfere with the ability to receive a phone call. If I am waiting for an expected email, I can always initiate a manual retrieval at any time. I understand the Blackberry retrieves email about every 10 seconds. Again this is not a problem since email retrieval on the Blackberry does not block phone calls from being received.

Filters can also be established to limit receipt of email to messages that meet certain criteria and to place certain categories of email in specific folders other than the inbox.

This is good for email from list serves that you prefer not clog your inbox. However you can access them easily by selecting the appropriate folder, which is easy to do.

With all the email account configurations that are available, it is nifty that you can have different settings for each email account.

### **Web Browsing**

Web browsing is fairly good, despite the small screen. Some sites seem to adjust to the screen size while others do not, and you must scroll through each page. One interesting thing is that if you have a telephone number that appears any place on a web page, you seem to generally be able to click on the phone number to initiate a phone call to that number. Web browsing was available on the Kyocera, but with a data service on the 650, the speed of downloading information is much faster. Not as fast as broadband with a DSL cable modem but 2 to 3 times faster than a 56k dialup modem. This has come in very handy.

### **Documents**

A neat utility that comes with the 650 is called Documents to Go. The utility is loaded onto your PC, and you can select any Word, Excel or PowerPoint document to be loaded to the 650. With the premium version of Documents to Go, you can also use PDF documents. Whenever you synch the 650 with your PC, the selected documents will be checked to see if there have been any changes to the versions on the PC. If so, the updated version will be uploaded to the 650. I was pleasantly surprised to see how easy it is to read the documents on the 650 screen, and how easy it is to use. Menu items are added to Word and Excel, so it is very easy to designate a document being worked on to be designated for Documents to Go.

### **Use as Modem**

I had the 650 about a month before I made any attempt to use it as a modem. A few days before I was scheduled to travel out of town, I thought I would try to set up the 650 to work as a modem for my laptop. I couldn't find anything in the instruction manual to accomplish this. I checked to see if there were any Yahoo groups focused on the 650. I found one that had several message threads dealing with "tethering" the 650 to a laptop to be used as a modem. The last message thread was at least several months old, and it seemed to suggest that Verizon does not allow that use. Apparently, each cell phone company has the 650 configured differently to some degree.

Since this is the feature that might have tipped the balance in favor of my purchase decision, I returned to the Verizon store. My salesman still advised that the 650 could be used as a modem. He did not know exactly how, and he suggested my calling Verizon technical support services. I did that with a bit of trepidation, because on account of the messages on the Yahoo group I thought I might be told I was not permitted to tether my 650. Technical services advised that I could do it, but Verizon does not provide technical

support for that use. However, with a few hints from that technical service call and a reference to some shareware available on the web, I was able to set up the 650 as a modem with relative ease. The software I used is PdaNet.

ZdNet said both the 650 and the SCH-i730 could not be used as modems. As mentioned, third party software enables that feature on the 650. I do not know if there is similar software for the SCH-i730. From its website, it appeared clear that PdaNet works only on a Trēo. PdaNet can be found at [www.junefabrics.com](http://www.junefabrics.com). It does not appear that the Blackberry can be used as a modem.

### **Bluetooth**

I should mention that I connect my 650 to my laptop wirelessly with the 650's built-in Bluetooth capability. For those who do not know, Bluetooth is a wireless connection that of very limited range (usually about 30 feet). Bluetooth on the 650 appears to be set up with software only for wireless synchronization with a PC and for connection to a wireless headset. PdaNet, handled the set up as a modem with ease.

It seems that the Bluetooth functionality on the 650 has been designed with security in mind. You can designate that only certain specific devices can access the 650. I imagine this is probably standard Bluetooth procedure (this is the first time I have used Bluetooth technology). Apparently it is commonly used also to connect wirelessly to printers. To accomplish my Bluetooth connection, I had to acquire a Bluetooth adaptor, which connects to one of my laptop's USB ports. The adaptor was relatively inexpensive

### **Camera**

The use of the 650 as a digital camera and camcorder is nice touch. I have actually used these features more than I expected. You can get the 650 without the camera features, and this is advisable if you want to use it in places where cameras are not permitted such as in courts.

### **Summary**

The bottom line is that I have been very pleased with the Trēo, and it has functioned almost flawlessly for me (even after dropping it once). I do not think there is any one feature that is not available on other cell phones. I think the Trēo 650 is the only Palm device with all of its features. In selecting a cell phone, you must consider the features that you need and are willing to pay for on a monthly basis as well as the cost of the phone. As a Palm device, you must remember that on the 650 you will not be able to use Graffiti that is commonly available on Palm devices as one of their distinguishing features. As a cell phone user, you must be aware that when using the data services (including when the 650 is automatically checking for your e-mail), you will not be able to receive calls (although the caller will be able leave voice mail). The Blackberry has a major advantage in this category.

The only Windows Mobile smart phone mentioned is the Samsung SCH-i730. On ZdNet it was the highest rated in the Windows category. If you look in the smart phone reviews on ZdNet, you will also see reviews of other Windows Mobile phones that might suit your needs.