

# Cognitive Prosthetics

A Newsletter of the Consortium for Handheld Technologies at the Partnership for People with Disabilities, Virginia Commonwealth University

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Available online at:

[www.vcu.edu/  
partnership/pda](http://www.vcu.edu/partnership/pda)

## Thank You Handspring!



This Summer the Consortium team was honored with a gift of 50 PDA's from the Handspring Foundation. This donation of reconditioned but like new Visor Platinum devices will help us reach out to many more people who need them in the year to come.

In the marketplace, Visor Platinum PDA's have been discontinued, which is a shame, since their monochrome screens preserve battery life and their unique

ability to accept multi-functional add-on modules makes them more flexible than most other PDA's.

Users find that they are quite straightforward and easy to use, too. (See the testimony of one user in the story below.)

We are fortunate to have these tools at our disposal. They allow for flexibility in meeting the needs of individuals with cognitive impairments and provide an excellent springboard for our ongoing research.

Thank you to the far-sighted and generous folks at the Handspring Foundation, who have found a way to expand the world of PDA users by sharing their technology with programs like ours.



*"My whole life is in my palm pilot. I couldn't get up in the morning without it."*

## How my PDA has Changed my Life

By Bob Brackett

I was sitting at a red light behind 20 to 30 cars on Pantops Mountain in Charlottesville, Virginia when my life suddenly and abruptly changed forever. The explosion of energy which ripped through my vehicle knocked me unconscious, and in addition to causing painful physical injuries, also caused a "closed head injury". I never thought anything like this could ever happen to me, or to my wife and three children.

After a long struggle with denial, I finally agreed to neuropsychological testing at the University of Virginia. They confirmed my wife's suspicions. I have a brain injury which affects my short-term memory, organizational skills, time awareness and ability to write or verbally express myself.

I subsequently employed a vocational counselor to help me identify strategies and procedures that would help me at my workplace. We intended to bring in a job coach at no expense to my employer and submitted a request for "Reasonable Accommodations." Instead, I was terminated and escorted out of the building.

My life was spinning out of control and I found myself with two choices, either giving

up or figuring out some way to get around my "little quirks". I began implementing coping strategies without even realizing it. I progressed from a calendar to post-it notes on my computer, in my car and on my bathroom mirror. Despite all of my efforts, none of these systems worked effectively. I could not organize my notes or find the ones I needed. Worst of all, none of my notes helped me manage my time.

One day my spouse told me about a unique program she had heard about. The Partnership for People with Disabilities accepted me into their handheld technology program and provided me with a Handspring PDA. I was excited to be a part of their study and can say without any reservations that this little device is giving me hope that I will be a productive member of society again. It has changed my life, as well as, the lives of my family in so many positive ways.

My direct experience has convinced me that anyone with a brain injury would greatly benefit from incorporating a PDA into their daily lives and that one should be provided as part of any rehabilitative program. Anything less is a self-fulfilling prophecy for eventual failure. Vocational rehabilitation, psychological

(Continued next page)

## Featured Device: The Timex Datalink Watch

One of the simplest and most readily useable cognitive prostheses is the Timex Datalink watch. Initially marketed in 1998, the Datalink comes in a variety of styles for men and women. Now that Timex has begun to phase them out, in preparation for a more powerful PDA watch due in 2003, you can buy them quite cheaply (\$50) on the Timex.com website and for less than that on the auction websites.

*Using the Datalink:* You need to have a home pc in order to program the watch, and your operating system must be a pre-Microsoft XP version, but downloading the program using the enclosed disk is a snap, and the computer screen interface takes you through each step of the process for loading information into your watch in a logical and easily followed sequence. You can program in task reminders and to do lists, linked to alarms, along with phone numbers and other information.

To download, you simply press a button, hold the watch up to the computer screen and wait while it all beams over automatically. Amazing! When your reminder alarm goes off, your printed message scrolls across the watch-face ("take your blue pill", for instance).

One of the most welcome features of the Datalink is that it's a watch. Forgetful users

might misplace a handheld device, but it's hard to lose something that's strapped to your wrist. Another strength is that the Datalink isn't overloaded with functions, so it's easy to navigate those it does have. And for many people with cognitive impairments, it's the reminder alarm that means the most. Also, since you program the watch from your computer keyboard, you don't get cramped fingers trying to enter information on a tiny screen, as with many of the other electronic personal organizers on the market.

For many people with cognitive impairments, the Timex Datalink watch is a terrific, inexpensive solution to everyday forgetfulness. Though a newer, more complicated version is due this year, you may find that the good old Datalink has all the features you need to stay on schedule and on top of your game.

*Datalink watches can be purchased at department stores and online at [www.timex.com](http://www.timex.com).*



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*You simply press a button, hold the watch up to your computer screen, and the information beams over automatically. Amazing!*

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### Useful Websites:

[www.vcu.edu/partnership/pda](http://www.vcu.edu/partnership/pda)

Consortium for Handheld Technology  
webpage.

[www.cerebreon.com](http://www.cerebreon.com)

Free online courses on using  
cognitive prostheses.

[www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org)

Helpful online catalog of available  
electronic cognitive prosthetics

[www.vacni.org](http://www.vacni.org)

Commonwealth Neurotrauma  
Initiative.

[www.tech-dis.ac.uk](http://www.tech-dis.ac.uk)

British website devoted to PDA users  
with disabilities.



### About Our Organization . . .

The Commonwealth Consortium for Handheld Technologies is a research and disability service program at the Partnership for People with Disabilities of Virginia Commonwealth University. Our mission is to expand opportunities for individuals with disability through the use of emerging portable computer technology. The Consortium is sponsored by a program development grant of the Commonwealth Neurotrauma Initiative.

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