TOOLS of the TRADE

NavTrac RTV10

The new LiveView GPS NavTrac RTV10 combines three business functions in one GPS device. It has the conventional GPS navigation controls, but it also can provide critical tracking of the vehicle in which it's operating and two-way communication to the driver as well. You get detailed maps and turn-by-turn navigation, and you can see your fleet of delivery vehicles in real time using a website interface. In the event you need to contact any of the drivers, there's two-way messaging that allows managers to communicate with drivers through the same Web interface. Lost or stolen vehicles can be located. NavTrac updates vehicle position, speed, and direction every 10 seconds. The month-to-month subscription service is maintained without contracts, provides unlimited messaging and live tracking, and is available for $39.99 per month. The RTV10 has a 4.3-inch TFT LCD with 480 × 272 resolution. The overall dimensions are 5" × 3" × .5". The screen is a resistive-type touch panel, and there's a built-in speaker. The unit has built-in 4GB resident flash memory, and the RAM is 64MB of DRAM. The NavTrac comes with a 12-volt DC power adapter and mounting cradle with bracket. The operating system is Windows CE .Net 5.0 Core Version.
www.liveviewgps.com

Nikon D5000

First released in the middle of last month, the Nikon D5000 is categorized as an upper-entry-level DSLR—that is, a digital single lens reflex—that sells for about $700. The nomenclature hardly begins to cover it. The camera also captures high-definition video, has a very flexible Live View shooting system, in-camera image processing, 19 auto-exposure scene modes, and even an optional GPS unit that will Geo-tag every image's latitude, longitude, and altitude, with satellite time-of-day. The D5000 has imported a number of the features of Nikon's D90 at a lower price. The 2.7-inch LCD color monitor on the back is vari-angle and can be positioned to flip up, down, and sideways to let you see what you are shooting over your head or around the corner. Picture quality is controlled by the 12.3-megapixel DX-format CMOS image sensor. The D-Movie mode with sound records 720p HD movie clips. There are 19 auto-exposure scene modes that qualify the camera as "entry level"—these include portrait, silhouette, landscape, sunset, candlelight, beach/snow, and so on. There are four auto-focus modes, including Face-priority, which looks for face fleshtones on which to focus. There's even an auto mode to restore lost shadows and highlights in high-contrast images. In-camera retouching includes red-eye correction, straighten, perspective control, image overlay, soft filtering, color outline effect, switch to black-and-white, and more. Shooting lag is eliminated with continuous shooting speeds as fast as four frames per second without delay. A family of additional Nikkor lenses and accessories extend the camera's possibilities.
www.nikonusa.com

Dell Vostro A90

The Dell Vostro A90 is the company's latest ultra compact designed for "the on-the-go professional or frequent business traveler." Closely resembling the Dell Mini 9, the A90 is a netbook with a matte-black finish. It's small and lightweight, 9.13" × 6.77" × 1.07" with a base model weight of 2.36 pounds. The screen is an 8.9-inch wide-screen WSVGA (1024 × 600 resolution) TrueLife™. The processor is a 1.6GHz Intel Atom N270. Memory is configurable up to 1GB DDR2 Single

Channel 533MHz with on-board storage in the form of a solid-state drive capable of up to 16GB. The basic operating system is Windows XP Home Edition, or you can opt for factory-installed Ubuntu Linux 8.04. Network connections include integrated Ethernet interface, 802.11 b/g Wi-Fi®, and optional integrated Bluetooth module. There are two speakers and an optional 0.3 megapixel cameral with integrated microphone. The A90 has three USB 2.0 compliant four-pin ports, a 15-pin VGA video connector, a memory-card reader that can handle SD/SDIO/MMC, microphone and headphone jacks, and a security card slot. For security, there's a built-in Kensington cable lock slot. The basic A90 is $349 from Dell.
www.dell.com

Kensington Accessories

With the rush by so many manufacturers to release their own netbooks (ultra-compact notebooks), it's not surprising that the peripheral suppliers are creating lines of accessories designed especially for these smaller computers. In April, Kensington Computer Products Group introduced a line of what they call Five Essentials for Netbook Enthusiasts. Because these computers are so "pocketable," one of the most interesting Kensington offerings is its security lock for netbooks. It consists of a four-wheel combination lock that fits into the security slot on the computer and is connected to a six-foot self-coiling steel cable that retracts down to three inches. The lock can be set with up to 10,000 different roll-wheel combinations. Kensington also has two small mice, one wired and one wireless, and a power adapter for netbooks that has an additional USB power port built in. Finally, the reversible sleeve is a cushioned cover for seven- to nine-inch netbooks.
www.kensington.com

TECH FORUM

The Next War—Android, Fennec, and the Phones

By Michael Castelluccio, Editor

IF YOU THOUGHT THE BROWSER WARS were over with everyone quietly settling back into their own territories, you might be mistaken. True, the Microsoft attempt to "cut off Netscape's air supply," which led to the Department of Justice (DOJ) and 20 states filing a U.S. v. Microsoft civil action, that's all ancient history (1998). Today, the Web traveler has the choice of a half dozen or more established browsers from Redmond, Wash., to Farnebu, Norway. No longer are you likely to hear from behind corporate doors, "We're going to finish this by standing on their throats." Yet the quiet is deceptive.

The great browser war (Web War I) devolved into a slog fought mainly in federal courts, but the original battleground was the network, as in "the network is the computer." What actually was at stake was control of the computer. And Microsoft was able to come from so far behind because of its established base, the Windows operating system, through which it delivered a free browser. The browser was seen by many as the virtual "operating system" for this new computer called the Internet.

Today, Microsoft finds itself behind again. This time, it's Google that's in the lead on the most pervasive network. The prospect of a Web War II, however, may not shape up as it did last time. This time, the widely established base, the Maginot Line if you care to look at it that way, belongs to the world's search company from Mountain View. And even more important, this conflict might involve a much wider draft. It could be that as the PC is replaced on the network by smartphones, it will be the developing world that will provide the forces necessary to raise an unstoppable offensive.

Last fall, in an article titled "The Meek Shall Inherit the Web," *The Economist* predicted, "In future, most new

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Internet users will be in developing countries and will use mobile phones. Expect a wave of innovation." A prime example cited in the article was the fact that 2008 was the year that "China overtook America as the country with the largest number of Internet users—currently over 250 million." The potential of mobile Internet growth was further bolstered by the 600 million mobile-phone subscribers in the country. Google's president in China, Lee Kai-fu, had at this point already admitted that his company was redesigning its products for the smartphone subscribers in a market where "most Chinese users who touch the mobile Internet will have no PC at all."

Another example of this drift away from PCs that *The Economist* pointed to was Opera Software (a Norwegian browser company that has a mobile version) and its growth in mobile Web browsing. "The number of Web pages viewed in June [2008] by the 14 million users of its software was over three billion, a 300% increase on a year earlier. The fastest growth was in developing countries including Russia, Indonesia, India, and South Africa."

One month after the article in *The Economist*, *E-Week* ran an article, "Windows Mobile Is an Also-ran." In it, *E-Week* claimed, "Mobile phones are the future of computing, and they are ideally suited for accessing Web services. [The mobile phone will be] the device most likely to subsume the PC's computing and informational dominance [functioning as] the natural gateway to Web 2.0 platform applications and services."

Microsoft's advantage in the previous browser war, the established base of the Windows operating system, has vaporized in the mobile world. Gartner predicted the sale of more than 1.25 billion handsets in 2008. That number would eclipse the entire Windows PC base. Near the end of last year, the worldwide ranking for mobile operating systems was:

1. Symbian OS from Symbian Ltd. (46% market share)
2. iPhone OS from Apple Inc. (17.3% market share)
3. BlackBerry OS from RIM (15.2% market share)
4. Windows Mobile from Microsoft (13.6% market share)
5. Linux OS (5.1% market share)

(Market share data from Canalys, "Worldwide smart mobile device market, Q3 2008")

Mobile OSs often are inextricably linked with particular hardware. The BlackBerry and iPhone are prime examples of inseparable booster and rocket combinations. A more recent combination, the T-Mobile G1 phone, is seen by some as eventual serious competition for Apple's iPhone. The G1 runs on Google's Android operating system and employs an Android browser. To date, about one million G1s have been sold, and T-Mobile says users have downloaded an average of 40 apps. Far fewer than the 500 million downloaded by iPhone users, but the G1 and Android are just getting started (first released in October 2008), and Google has app competitions with $250,000 and $100,000 prizes for developers.

ANDROID AND FENNEC

Former *Forbes* senior writer and current GigaOM blogger Om Malik had this to say about Google's Android:

"Google's Android, in my opinion, is a direct competitor to Windows Mobile. Put another way, it's Windows Mobile done right. I say this because I have tried dozens of Windows Mobile-based phones, and their user interface always leaves me feeling like someone with multiple cuts being submerged in salt water. Don't get me wrong—I think Windows Mobile as an OS has come a long way since its early, awkward roots. It's just that the new guys are better. A lot better."

There's even a descendant of the legendary Netscape Navigator joining the contest. Firefox's customized Fennec mobile browser has just been released in Beta 1. The Fennec (a small species of fox) browser removes all the controls from the screen while remembering a lot of your own past behaviors. It uses touch controls and runs on Linux. For a look at a number of other browsers available for the various mobile operating systems, go to http://webtrends.about.com/od/mobileweb20/tp/list_of_mobile_web_browsers.htm. There are links for demos for a number of the browsers.

With Microsoft in fourth place in the field of international competition, the gunfire might not be as loud this time, but the struggle continues on a spectacular scale. **SF**