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# technology TODAY

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## The PDA Revolution

**H**AVE you ever thought about the past, present, and future of student classroom note passing? If you have, you probably realize that this method of communication started long before any of us were old enough to go to school. One can assume that the technique of passing notes started soon after Nicholas

Louis Robert built his first Fourdrinier papermaking machine in 1798.

Message passing is now going through a major metamorphosis as students adopt PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant) to transmit their notes around the classroom. Some school administrators took quick action to harness, rather than stop, what the students were doing. For example, this academic year's entering freshman at the University of South Dakota were all given Palm PDAs that are linked through a campus-wide infrared transmission system to the University's central computing system. USD students can now receive student bulletins, access the web, and even receive and send email using their Palm m500 PDA just about anywhere on campus.

**I attended a Nexian news conference** this past June in New York City. Chuck Ashman, President of Strategic Media Alliance, made the following statement as the conference was starting. As Ashman, who is also a spokesperson for Nexian, held up a Visor (see illustration) with a HandyGPS Pro module installed in it, he said, "I hold in my hand more processing power than existed on the planet earth on the day that Scott Carpenter circled the earth."

Commander Scott Carpenter was the keynote speaker at this news conference, and history remembers him as the second American astronaut to circle the earth on May 24, 1962. (You can hear a recording of this news conference on your computer by choosing the hypertext link "GPS Revolution Webcast" on Nexian's homepage at [www.nexian.com](http://www.nexian.com).)

With the assistance of Nexian, Handspring, and Targus I tested out what I now expect will eventually



morph into a replacement for a notebook computer. Actually, the Visor has been called the "Swiss Army Knife PDA" because of its numerous modules. The 53+ modules that exist today can morph the Visor into a cell phone, camera, MP3 audio player, tape recorder, audio book, electronic book, fax machine, internet surfing machine, emailing machine, and a personal GPS navigation machine.

**The HandyGPS Pro is a navigation** system that works with the Visor. It comes with two software packages that can help you find your way in unfamiliar but charted territory. The system can also help you plot your way through uncharted territory as it records your notes and route for future playback. Our government stopped downgrading the public side of GPS on May 1, 2001. This government change made the HandyGPS extremely accurate as long as trees, buildings, or foliage didn't block my view of the sky. In fact I was surprised that it worked perfectly in the front seat of my car without the external antenna that Nexian supplied.

The Targus Stowaway Keyboard enabled me to use the tiny machine to answer emails and type addresses and other notes with almost the same level of comfort that I have sitting at my notebook computer. At this past ITEA convention I ran into many teachers who were interested in providing their students with real GPS experiences. A module added to the Visor PDA that may already be in use in your school as a data-gathering instrument could make it feasible for you to teach GPS at a very reasonable cost. ☺

## Recalling the Facts

1. How are PDAs used to pass notes between people?
2. Why is the Visor often called the Swiss Army Knife PDA?
3. Why shouldn't drivers use the Handy GPS navigation system while driving their cars?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using an external keyboard with a PDA?