Your alphanumeric pager is about to become history

Products from Glenayre, Motorola about to redefine world of text paging

If you carry around one of those alphanumeric pagers clipped to your belt or stashed in your purse, trade it in now.

Two new pagers from Glenayre, and one from Motorola are about to dramatically redefine the world of text paging.

What's so big about these two little pagers is the fact that they are two-way.

Each pager is equipped with a tiny transmitter that acknowledges each message that is sent to you.

This means that you'll never lose a page again: If you should happen to be in the subway when somebody tries to page you, your pager won't send an acknowledgment, and the paging system will keep retransmitting the message for 99 hours.

The little transmitter also lets the paging system follow your pager as it moves around the United States. This lets SkyTel, the company offering the service, provide its customers with nationwide coverage for the cost of local paging – just $24.95/month for 600, 10-character message blocks.

It also means that all of your pages don't get retransmitted in Iowa, Idaho, and Texas, unless you happen to be in one of those states. That makes two-way pagers somewhat less susceptible to eavesdropping.

If all you want is better one-way paging, then consider trading in your pager for the Glenayre AccessMate or the Motorola PF1500. These two acknowledgment pagers are both the same size as a standard alphanumeric pager, both get 30 days of battery life off a single AA battery, and both weigh roughly the same – a bit less than a standard pager. SkyTel lets you buy either pager for $180 with its rent-to-own program – you pay $15/month for 12 months.

My recommendation, though, is that you pass up the limitations of these acknowledgment pagers and go with the Glenayre Access-Link II, a full-blown two-way pager. Although it's the same size and weight as a standard alphanumeric pager, the AccessLink II lets you reply to messages and transmit your own. You can even transmit e-mail or faxes from the device.

Granted, it's a little difficult to type out a message using the pager's tiny 6-button keyboard. In practice, I keep my messages short and don't mind it too much. SkyTel sells the pager for $240, spread over one year of $20/month payments.

Another two-way pager that's gaining some popularity is the Motorola PageWriter 2000. This pager looks more like a laptop computer than a pager – it has a full-blown QWERTY keyboard and a docking station to connect to your PC. But I don't like it. For starters, it's nearly four times the size of the AccessLink II.

Another problem is the battery: Instead of lasting for a full month, the PageWriter 2000 can only run for a few days before it needs a recharge. It's more expensive, too: $30/month for 12 months.

Although I've been a big fan of two-way paging since I first tried it early last year, I eventually gave up my two-way pager because it was too big. But with the new AccessLink II, I think that I'm going to go back to two-way paging. So far, the only problem that I've had with the AccessLink II comes from the display. The pager's belt holster scratches the display in one particular spot, effectively turning my four-line display into a 3.8-line display.

Hopefully this is something that Glenayre will be able to fix as production gears up.

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