

DIGITAL INK

INSTEAD OF THINKING OF A TABLET PC AS A DEVICE WITH A TOUCH SENSITIVE SCREEN, THINK OF IT AS A PEN-ENABLED DEVICE

feature called 'grab and go' in Tablet PC. This means you can take your device out of its docking station without any form of disconnection. The whole point of Tablet PC is that you use it on the move, so 802.11b is an absolute necessity. Of course wireless LAN, as well as infrared and Bluetooth are almost commonplace in laptops these days, but you can expect a Tablet PC to also include a wired Ethernet connection. However, 'grab and go' means that the device and its software are required to perform flawlessly even if you rudely yank the CAT5 cable out of the back and take your device for a walk.

Clearly, this is far less of an issue if you are already working wirelessly as all your connections will remain intact, with the exception of mains power. Some connections won't tolerate this sort of treatment, so Tablet PC doesn't have Serial, Parallel or PS/2 ports. Instead you'll find USB and FireWire ports.

It will come as little surprise that the Tablet PC's operating system is OEM-only, so you cannot buy it as a standalone product, as Microsoft will only supply it to manufacturers such as Acer, HP, Compaq and Viewsonic.

It's tricky to define where Tablet OS stops and Microsoft's applications and utilities

MICROSOFT WINDOWS JOURNAL VIEWER

PRICE: FREE - 7MB DOWNLOAD

KEY FEATURES: SHARE JOURNAL FILES WITH NON-TABLET PCs AND LAPTOPS

RATING:

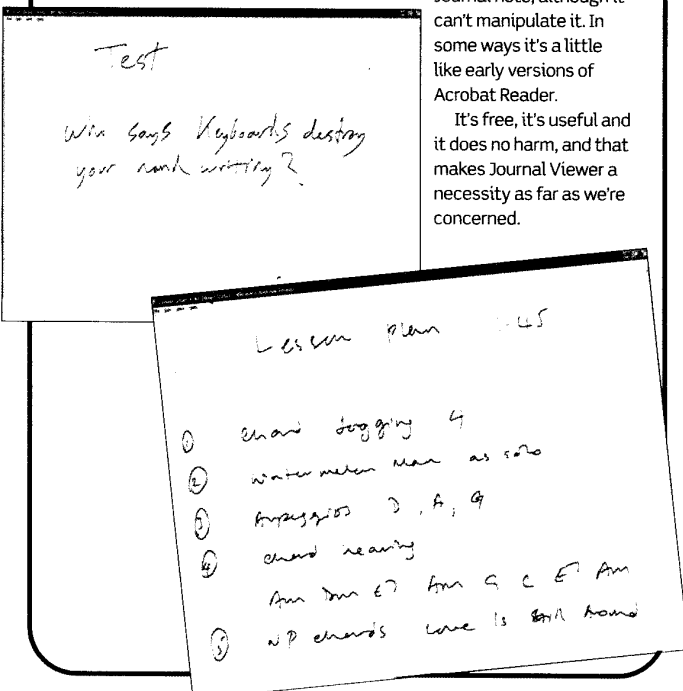
CONTACT: WWW.MICROSOFT.COM

Let's face it, you don't know many people who own a Tablet PC, so if you use the Journal and Ink facilities of your new Tablet to create handwritten notes in the Journal (.JNT) format you won't be able to distribute them. Or rather you can, but no one will be able to read them.

Microsoft is keen to spread the Tablet PC experience about, and if you look at its download site you'll find Journal Viewer v1.5 is available for free download. Once the software is installed on a PC or laptop that's running either Windows 2000 SP2 or Windows XP you'll find it can open and print a

Journal note, although it can't manipulate it. In some ways it's a little like early versions of Acrobat Reader.

It's free, it's useful and it does no harm, and that makes Journal Viewer a necessity as far as we're concerned.



KEYLOGIX ACTIVEDOCS FOR TABLET PC

PRICE FREE: \$179 (ONLINE)

KEY FEATURES: DOCUMENT CREATION TOOL FOR WORD

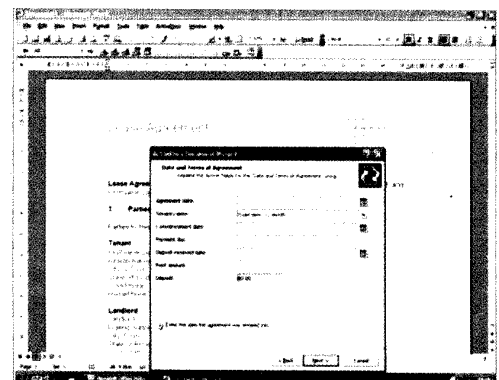
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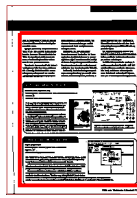
CONTACT: WWW.ACTIVEDOCS.COM

If you're on the sales force of a company that's prepared to make a modest investment, then you may find yourself on the road using your Tablet PC to fill out order forms and update customer details. It's much easier to do this with a decent sized screen than on a PDA, but you could end up using Microsoft Office to go through the same job time-after-time. This reflects the fact that Office is actually a number of very large modules, rather than an integrated whole, so there's room for an over-arching document creation tool, which actually lives within Microsoft Word.

ActiveDocs comes in three packages, of which Document Creation Tools is the most basic. The concept works best with Office 2003 as that allows you to use XML, which means that any data that you use and store has a decent chance of being accessible to other applications.

It's an incredibly slick package, but it really only pays dividends if you construct a decent number of similar documents.





start, but every Tablet PC includes software that makes full use of the handwriting feature of the screen.

To input data directly into your convertible Tablet PC you can use either the regular keyboard or the screen. Microsoft includes the Tablet PC Input Panel, which is much the same as the virtual keyboard that we have seen for some years now on PDAs.

Then there's the screen itself with its handwriting feature Write Anywhere, which uses Ink. Generally, this is done within its note taking utility called Journal. You can also use Microsoft's Sticky Notes utility to jot a

handwritten note, or to make a sketch. You then save the note and when you recall it to your screen it looks exactly the same as when you wrote it.

Alternatively, you can use Character Recognizer to convert handwritten text into a regular font, but this isn't the same as converting Ink to a digital format because Ink is a digital format. The significant point with Ink is that it can be used as an input for applications and utilities that have been developed for Tablet PC.

Incidentally the device also supports speech input. Among other things you can add audio notes to written ones in Journal, but frankly it

doesn't work very well, and a brief glance at Microsoft's various websites will show that it isn't pushing this aspect of Tablet PC with any particular vigour.

The important thing is how you use your Tablet PC, and although that partly depends on its form, you'll also find that the software that you use has a major impact.

So, Tablet PC may not be the revolution in mobile computing that Microsoft would have us believe. However, used in the right context it's a handy tool that can make many tasks easier. We've found six that should help convince you as well as improve the way you work.

MINDJET MINDMANAGER FOR TABLET PC

PRICE: £149/£175 (EX/INC. VAT)

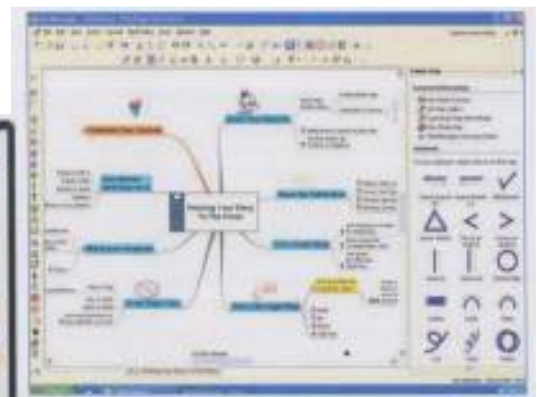
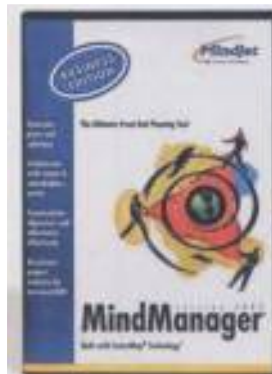
KEY FEATURES: FLOWCHARTS AND TEAM WORKING FOR THE TABLET

RATING:

CONTACT: WWW.MINDJET.COM/UK

When you finish one of those brainstorming sessions that involve a flipchart and lots of coloured market pens, you end up with lots of paper that should contain plenty of useful information. However, it's never in a form that you can easily edit and distribute.

Mindjet has updated its MindManager 2002 software for the Tablet PC platform to tackle this very problem. At the heart of the software are maps, which look similar to a Visio layout, and Mindjet includes templates in the software. The map is a flowchart that can be exported into Word, PowerPoint and HTML and it naturally lends itself to annotation with Ink. This ability to alter maps quickly and easily during meetings gives Tablet PC a distinct advantage



over a conventional laptop. Maps can be exported into other applications simply by dragging and dropping the required fields into a new document.

FRANKLINCOVEY TABLEPLANNER 3

PRICE: \$130 ONLINE

KEY FEATURES: USE YOUR TABLET TO PLAN YOUR LIFE

RATING:

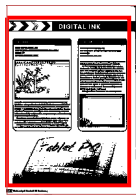
CONTACT: WWW.FRANKLINCOVEY.COM

Open TabletPlanner 3 and you'll find yourself facing a wizard that asks if you want to work with contacts, goals, notes, appointments or tasks, and you'll also get a daily homily that's presumably intended to make you pause for thought.

The software draws together most aspects of your life so you can use your Tablet PC to plan and organise your life. It also synchronises with Outlook/Exchange 2003 (using XML to manage data) and allows you to search and index your Ink notes.

These are useful features, but if you sync with Outlook 2003 we would have thought you would be able to manage your contacts and appointments without the assistance of additional software. The other snag is that a Tablet PC simply isn't as convenient as a PDA or smartphone when you're looking for a device that you can carry everywhere. The big question is whether you need to shoehorn handwritten notes into Outlook; if so, TabletPlanner 3 could be just what you are looking for.





DIGITAL INK

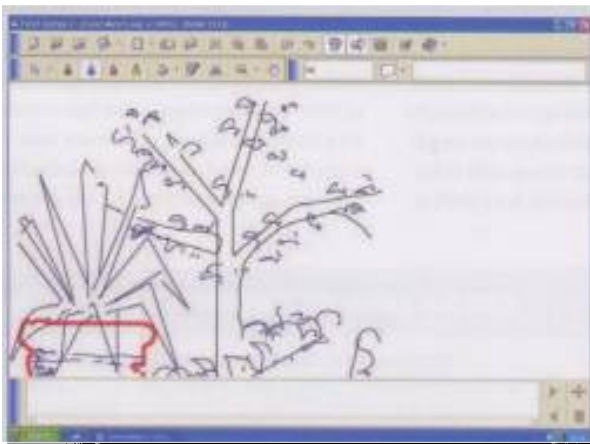
COREL GRAFİGO2

PRICE: £58/£69 (EX/INC. VAT)

KEY FEATURES: ANNOTATE DOCUMENTS OR DO A SKETCH

RATING: [5]

CONTACT: WWW.COREL.CO.UK



Some of us are about as artistic as a sea slug, but Corel doesn't think that should stop us from making decent sketches. Grafigo2 uses a combination of the Windows Print function to import graphical files from other applications and its own .SVG (Scalable Vector Graphic) format to work with files. There's a selection of four pens and an intelligent eraser, and the Drawing Assistance button automatically straightens lines, recognises shapes and can effectively snap from one object to another.

If you choose, you can also draw truly freehand, which is likely to suit the artists among you. Select the text box and Grafigo2 will convert your handwriting to a clear font, but of course that's a feature of Tablet PC anyway.

Once you've finished your drawing - with or without text comments - you can email it directly from Grafigo2 so that colleagues can collaborate with you.

ALIAS SKETCHBOOK PRO

PRICE: £145/£170 (EX/INC. VAT)

KEY FEATURES: DRAWING PACKAGE FOR YOUR TABLET

RATING: [5]

CONTACT: WWW.ALIAS.COM

SketchBook Pro is a fully-fledged drawing package, which makes it ideally suited to the pen based interface of a Tablet PC.

The first impression is that all the toolbars are missing, thanks to the incredibly tidy interface that Alias has developed. In the bottom left corner of the screen are four buttons, and when you touch, for example, the pens and brushes button, a cluster of eight more buttons pop up all round up. You simply move the tip of your stylus through the pen that you wish to select and off you go. It takes a fraction of a second and uses only a tiny amount of your precious screen space. The same applies to tools and colour selection. Of course you can use layers and the pens are fully pressure sensitive, just as you would expect.

Although we like it, SketchBook Pro is rather expensive.

