

Good To Great

Good Technology goes toe to toe with Research in Motion by focusing on the software used by BlackBerry -- not the device.

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There's a reason the BlackBerry wireless messaging devices by Research in Motion (RIM) have been branded "CrackBerries" by cognoscenti. Once you have access to always-on wireless email from the road without having to lug around a laptop, it's impossible to quit tapping out messages--on the subway, on the street, even during family meals. Indeed, the gunmetal-gray devices with their miniature keyboards have become the must-have accessory for, well, seemingly everyone, from Wall Street analysts to the teen soap stars of the TV drama *Everwood* --not to mention my boss, who zips us all messages during his early morning commute. (Uh, great!)

But BlackBerries aren't perfect. And while RIM scored its 1 millionth customer in February, that still leaves 65 million Americans online every day who *don't* yet do the thumb-twiddling RIM thing. Which means there's plenty of opportunity for a competitor that does wireless email a bit better.

That would be Good Technology. The Silicon Valley company introduced its GoodLink service two years ago. Since then, it has made a great technology even better, quietly challenging RIM on functionality and ease of use. It has also not so quietly stolen away some big customers such as Electronic Arts and recruiter Spencer Stuart.

Unlike RIM, Good's core product isn't a machine per se. GoodLink is just software--which works on whatever wireless data device you own (even old BlackBerries). If you like scrawling emails with a stylus, use GoodLink on a PocketPC. If you crave a more phonelike converged device, go for Good on a Treo 600.

GoodLink has always allowed customers to synchronize calendars, contacts, and email with their PC system without using a cradle, and to open email attachments--two important features that most BlackBerries offered only recently. And GoodLink's interface looks just like the one on Microsoft Outlook, the email application most folks

use at work. BlackBerry's proprietary interface, with its unfamiliar icons, is a bit harder to get used to.

But email is just the low-hanging fruit of the wireless data market. "Mobilizing databases--SAP, ERP, Oracle, anything that actually runs companies--that prospect is worth every penny to enterprises," says IDC analyst Kevin Burden. And that's something GoodLink has done well from the start. At the West Coast law firm of Keesal, Young and Logan, for one, attorneys access time and billing applications and client databases through GoodLink-powered handhelds. That makes GoodLink a powerful productivity tool.

Of course, RIM doesn't dominate the market for nothing. In March, it announced that it, too, will offer service (later this year) on multiple handheld devices and operating systems. The release of BlackBerry 4.0 will also support access to corporate PeopleSoft, Oracle, and SAP applications. And the next generation of BlackBerry hardware features splashy metallic red and blue phone-and-data devices with brighter color screens, backlit keyboards, and access to full-HTML Web sites. There's even a push-to-talk walkie-talkie model offered through Nextel.

It's all impressive. But RIM is still betting mostly on its own devices, whereas Good is positioning itself as a software licensor. Justin Hectus, the information director who made Keesal's decision to dump BlackBerry, says this is why he supports Good in the long run. "The next great device to answer everyone's prayers won't be BlackBerry. It won't be Good, either, but Good's software will be on it, and that's why I'm willing to bet on them."



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