

Technology

By Joe Dysart

Rhapsody in Bluetooth

For wireless fans, devices that take the technology to the next level.

If you've ever seen an otherwise normal-looking person wandering through an airport seemingly talking to himself—and he has a funny piece of plastic hanging off his ear—you have already been exposed to Bluetooth®. A communications technology that enables computerized devices to link wirelessly, Bluetooth has been powering wireless headsets for cell phones for years, inspiring even the most casual cell phone user to feel as if she has just stepped out of a *Star Trek* movie. In the process, Bluetooth has also spawned a number of extremely useful spinoffs. These days, the technology can be used on your iPod, your prehistoric landline phone and even your sunglasses.

You can find all the basic and very handy Bluetooth-enabled devices—including wireless keyboards, mice, printers and the like—at any good office technology supply center. What you might not find is what follows: some of the latest releases from the world of Bluetooth that truly push the technology into a new dimension.

A Little Traveling Music

If you'd like to catch some tunes between wireless phone calls, the **Motorola H5 Miniblue Bluetooth headset**—at \$111.81–\$169.99, according to shopping search engine Froogle (www.froogle.google.com)—may be to your liking. A one-piece unit that nestles behind your ear, the Motorola H5 is designed to please audiophiles, offering richer treble and bass tones than are available with standard Bluetooth phone headsets. Switching between a phone call and the music on your MP3 player is accomplished with a simple

touch of a button.

Of course you can also use the MP3 listening capability to catch up on some business-related podcasts or similar digital recordings.

By Land and by Cell

Trainers who simply can't find enough ways to automate their lives will like the **Plantronics Voyager 510 SL Plus** (\$229–\$429.95). Another microphone and in-ear speaker unit, this product boasts the ability to wirelessly route all the calls you make and receive, no matter what the source. Cell phone calls are routed like calls from any other Bluetooth-enabled cell phone; and landline calls are handled with a special mechanical “lifter,” which robotically raises and lowers the handset on your landline phone when you need to make or receive a call the (gasp!) old-fashioned way.

This version of the Voyager comes with all the bells and whistles, including two standard indoor chargers, a car charger, a USB charger and a belt-clip carrying pouch.

Letting Freedom Ring, Wirelessly

Scores of businesspeople are already using **Skype™**, an Internet-based phone service, to make free phone calls from one PC to another. There's no charge to open an account, and you can talk for as long as you like anywhere in the world. More recently Skype expanded its free service to enable any Skype user to make calls to cell phones and traditional phone lines as well. That means you can now use Skype to call Toledo and talk to your Aunt Millie, who uses a rotary phone she got

back in the 1950s. Or you can call your partner on her cell in Manhattan. (The Skype deal for landlines and cell phones is good for calls in the United States and Canada only.)

Now comes the **ClearSky VoIP Bluetooth phone from TRENDnet** for \$109.99. With this baby, you can make all those same free phone calls, only wirelessly. Once the program is installed, you can kick back at your desk, or out in your backyard, and wirelessly call anyone in the United States and Canada for free. Plus the PC-to-PC calls around the world are still absolutely free.

TRENDnet decided to appeal to more conventional phone users with this unit. So instead of having something that hangs on your ear, the ClearSky VoIP Bluetooth phone resembles the standard telephone headset you've probably had on your desk for years.

While Skype has no plans of sunseting its free PC-to-PC calls anytime soon, the free PC-to-traditional phone line service is being offered only through the close of 2006. Still, the smart money says this service could either be extended or offered at a rate that most traditional phone companies could never reach out and touch.

Wireless, With a Little Attitude

For people who'd rather not look like they just walked off the *Starship Enterprise* when they're talking on their cell phone, **Oakley's Razrwire sunglasses** might be the ticket at \$245. Essentially, you can take in some rays, talk wirelessly on a cell phone and listen to any Bluetooth-enabled MP3 player, including your iPod,

with these too-cool shades. The units come in black, brown or white, and the best part is you can write 'em off as a business expense.

GPS and the Cell Phone

Apparently, all those articles heralding the coming convergence of seemingly disparate technologies were no bunk. If you do a lot of traveling, you'll find the **Bluetooth-enabled Garmin StreetPilot c550 GPS** (\$857.13) is a convergence case in point.

Primarily a unit that maps door-to-door driving directions for you, the c550 will also process calls when you link it wirelessly with your cell phone. Making or receiving a call requires little more than tapping on the unit's screen a time or two. That virtually hands-free operation gives you more time to keep your focus on the road—and to avoid tickets in areas where hands-on cell phone use is strictly prohibited.

The c550 also enables you to add all the phone numbers you regularly call to its system for easy, tap-screen access. Plus its software features an exhaustive point-of-interest database that includes hotels, restaurants, stores and the like, and comes complete with dialable telephone numbers. So if you're cruising into a new town and you find a nice restaurant you'd like to stop at in the c550 database, you simply tap the restaurant name on the screen, and the c550 will dial the number for you.

Music aficionados will also be grateful for the included MP3 player, which stores and plays up to 700 megabytes of tunes.

Safe From Prying Eyes

As with all wireless devices, a Bluetooth-enabled cell phone or computer has the drawback of limited security. While most of these devices have an electronic "cloaking" mode, which guards against wireless

intrusions, busy users don't always remember to flip on that switch. **Oakley's Vertical Computer Bag 2.0** (\$90) works as a failsafe backup, physically shielding any computerized device from the sometimes prying fingers of radio frequency waves. Once you tuck your cell, PDA or other Bluetooth-enabled device inside this backpack-shaped carryall, your data will be much tougher to rummage through wirelessly.

A Retrofit for Your Pre-Bluetooth Computer

If you happen to own at least one PC or notebook computer that is not Bluetooth-ready (and who doesn't?) you can retrofit your dinosaur with the **Blue Dongle from Mr. Handsfree** for \$29.95, according to a Froogle search. A simple, one-piece device that fits in the palm of your hand, the dongle inserts into any USB port, enabling the computer or laptop to communicate wirelessly with Bluetooth-compatible keyboards, mice, printers and the like. (You can find links to similar Bluetooth dongles on Froogle by using the search phrase "Bluetooth dongle.")

Solid, Basic Wireless Headset

Just getting started with Bluetooth? If you're simply looking for a basic headset to use for communicating wirelessly while on your cell phone, the **JABRA BT500** is a solid choice at \$139.99. The one-piece unit, which includes both a microphone and an in-ear speaker, affixes comfortably behind the ear and is designed to last 8 hours with its rechargeable battery.

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PRODUCT INFORMATION

Blue Dongle from Mr. Handsfree:
www.mrhandsfree.com/?p=bdp&gr=11&l=en

Bluetooth-enabled Garmin StreetPilot c550 GPS: www.garmin.com/products/sp550/

ClearSky VoIP Bluetooth phone from TRENDnet: www.trendnet.com/products/TVP-SP1BK.htm

Jabra BT500 cell phone headset: www.jabra.com/JabraCMS/NA/EN/MainMenu/Products/WirelessHeadset/JabraBT500/JabraBT500.htm

Motorola H5 Miniblue Bluetooth headset: www.motorola.com/motoinfo/product/details.jsp?globalObjectId=133

Oakley's Razrwire sunglasses: <http://oakley.com/o/o2261d>

Oakley's Vertical Computer Bag 2.0: <http://oakley.com/o/c507t>

Plantronics Voyager 510 SL Plus: www.plantronics.com/north_america/en_US/products/cat29880043/cat29880043/prod5460017

Skype: www.skype.com/products/skypeout/rates/all_rates.html