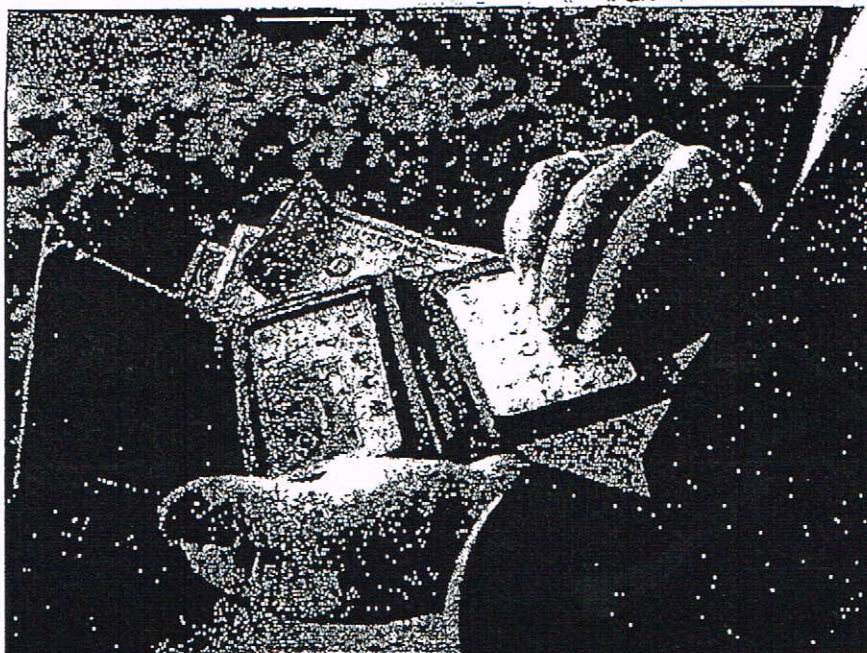


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Small is beautiful: Ted Selker's prototype wallet PC can send e-mail and do business with the bank

It's at hand: a mini PC to suit every wallet

WHILE computer experts talk about the possibility of the wallet PC, Ted Selker from IBM has put words into action, writes Sean Hargrave.

As manager of the company's ergonomics-research centre in California, he was encouraged to produce his prototype after experiments showed that people could type 80% as fast with one hand as they can with two. This prompted Selker to construct a miniature keyboard in which each key represents two characters. These are alternated using a shift button,

COMPUTERS

rather like typing a capital on a traditional keyboard.

"People think it will be difficult but everybody gets the idea the first time they try," said Selker. "It's a real breakthrough because it enables a keyboard with decent-sized keys to be put on the wallet."

Selker's prototype uses paging technology to send and receive e-mail. A dedicated button allows the user to debit

and credit his or her bank account. Selker is working on technology that will incorporate a tiny scanner that will allow business-card details to be recorded and credit-card details transmitted to a cash till when shopping.

Much of the work is conceptual, although Selker claims it all works. The one problem is the batteries required to make it work are too heavy.

"That's easily fixed," he says. "The thing for me now is to convince the executives this is ready and hope they launch it."