

Culture

IBM joins the Windows CE-b sed race

The WorkPad z50 will be large for a device based on Microsoft's Windows CE operating system, but small compared to the typical notebook PC.



Brooke Crothers
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4 min read

IBM will unveil its long-awaited handheld PC based on the Windows CE operating system tod y.

As reported earlier, the IBM WorkPad z50 will be large for a device based on Microsoft's Windows CE operating system, but small compared to the typical notebook PC.

The z50 is a "Jupiter"-class Windows CE device, which means that it looks a lot like a shrunken version of a ThinkPad notebook. It is similar in size to Hewlett-Packard's Jornada 820 and LG Electronics Phenom--both Windows CE devices.

Though small by notebook standards, it is bigger than the most typical Windows CE handhelds which can actually fit into the palm of your hand and use a stylus for input. This smaller class of device is exemplified by Compaq Computer's Aero 2110.

Devices based on the CE operating system are not exactly taking the computing world by storm, although they are gaining market share. Microsoft has previously acknowledged it is working out some of the kinks in the operating system, tweaking some problems with desktop synchronization and improving the interface.

But the platform offers some advantages. Windows CE offers "instant on," which is a bonus for anyone frustrated by the long boot-up time of most PCs, and much longer battery life than typical notebooks. In addition, these devices weigh 2 to 3 pounds on average, compared to 5-to-7-pound notebooks. Market analysts such as Mobile Insights' Gerry Purdy expect the category to grow at a clip of 100 percent per year.

The IBM z50 has addressed some of the drawbacks of the Jupiter platform, adding some features that blur the line between a CE device and notebook PC. For example, unlike most Windows CE devices, the z50 offers a hard drive: It comes with the capability to use IBM's new Microdrive. This matchbook-sized hard drive fits into a small slot in the device and offers data capacities up to 340 MB. But this device will not ship until later this year, said Bill Tsang, a manager at IBM's ThinkPad division.

IBM also offers a second option for hard-drive storage: the PC Card slot in the z50 can also accommodate a drive. These PC Card hard drives have capacities up to 1 GB.

As with most companies using Windows CE, IBM is aiming at corporate customers looking for a companion device rather than a full-blown notebook computer. "Some customers are saying they want a desktop with a companion device, not just one notebook," said Tsang.

There is a trend in corporate America to offer employees one notebook computer which serves as their desktop at work and a portable on the road. But Tsang says this doesn't work for all of IBM's customers, some of whom only need a small, lightweight, and functional companion which they can synchronize with their desktop.

The z50 weighs 2.6 pounds and boasts an 8.2-inch LCD screen capable of 64,000 colors--another departure from CE devices that usually offer only 256 colors. It also packs an NEC MIPS processor running at 133 MHz and can use up to 48MB of memory. It also has 20MB of ROM.

The keyboard is cramped compared to typical notebooks or desktop computers, but large compared to some of the tiny keyboards on the ultra-compact CE devices. IBM says it is "95 percent the size of current standard ThinkPad notebook keyboards."

It offers the typical suite of Microsoft "Pocket" applications including Word, Powerpoint, Internet Explorer, and Outlook. The integrated modem offers speeds of only 33-kbps. Tsang said this is done to save on battery life.

Battery life of eight hours is typical but can be extended to 16 hours with an optional attachment. The price for the z50 with 16MB of memory is $999.

IBM, surprisingly, has not kept this device under wraps. The company has been showing the device at various shows during the last six months. Tsang says IBM has waited this long to bring it to market in order to make sure all the software pieces were in place as the device is primarily targeted at corporate customers.

He points to one feature that allows information system managers to synchronize the z50 with desktop PCs using an application on the server. This makes it easier for a large company to implement this synchronization feature company wide.

The Palm operating system is also supported with this software, highlighting an interesting aspect of IBM's product mix: The company is the sole provider of both Palm and Windows CE-based devices, indicating that Big Blue's handheld strategy is still evolving.

The z50 will not be available at consumer stores such as CompUSA or OfficeMax but through large resellers and some online reseller such as Computer Discount Warehouse.

Options include an extended-life battery ($199), UltraPort Replicator ($99), 32MB memory upgrade ($89), and more.

News.com's Stephanie Miles contributed to this report.

Advertisement

How to Fix an iPhone Stuck in SOS Mode

Seeing 'SOS' on your iPhone in an area with good coverage? Here's how to solve it.



Nelson Aguilar

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4 min read



Don't panic. There's a way to get back to your normal cell service coverage.

Kevin Heinz/CNET

Whether it was traveling down a long stretch of highway in the middle of nowhere or riding the subway, you've probably seen your iPhone display "SOS" at some point. While it might seem concerning at first, it's nothing to worry about. It simply means you've entered an area where you don't have your regular cellular service, and during this time, you can only make emergency calls.

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What's worse is that when you get back to an inhabited area with good cell coverage, you still might not be able to resume regular phone service. That pesky SOS status lingers in the corner of your screen, and no matter how high you raise your phone to the sky, you still can't connect to the internet.

The good news? You can fix it. Let's take a look at the iPhone's Emergency SOS via satellite service and what you can do when your iPhone gets stuck in Emergency SOS mode.

While you're here, check out how to use Emergency SOS via satellite to contact 911 and how to prevent your iPhone from automatically calling 911.

What exactly is Apple's Emergency SOS via Satellite?

Emergency SOS via satellite is a feature on the Apple iPhone 14 and newer versions of the device that allows you to get in contact with emergency services and share your location with them, even if you don't have cellular network service.

Whenever you don't have cellular service or Wi-Fi, you'll see "SOS" in the corner of your iPhone's screen , indicating that you can use Emergency SOS via satellite to get emergency help.

Note: *There's also Emergency SOS on every iPhone, and while this feature does call your local emergency number and share your location information with emergency services, it requires you to have service. It's not the same as Emergency SOS via satellite.*

So what's the problem with SOS mode?

Once your iPhone loses service and is in Emergency SOS mode, your device might have trouble finding your network, even if you're back in an area that has service. You might notice that someone else in the area has service while you don't, or vice versa. Luckily, there are various ways to tackle this issue.

Read more: Best iPhone in 2024

Emergency SOS in action.

Kevin Heinz/CNET

What to do if you're stuck in Emergency SOS mode

According to Apple, if you see "SOS" or "SOS only" in the status bar, you can do the following to help your device find a cellular network:

- **Make sure that you're in an area with cellular network coverage**. You can check in with people around you who appear to have service.
- **Turn your cellular data off and on**. Go to **Settings** > **Cellular** and turn **Cellular Data** off and back on.
- **Restart your iPhone**. On the iPhone X and later models, hold either of the volume buttons and the side button until the power off slider appears, and then drag the slider. Wait 30 seconds and then press and hold down on the side button to turn your iPhone back on. If you have an older iPhone model, here's how to restart it.
- **Check for a carrier settings update**. Your carrier may send out a carrier settings update to improve your cellular network connectivity and performance. As long as you're connected to the internet, go to **Settings** > **General** > **About** and check to see if there is an update available.
- **Turn your cellular line off and on**. Go to **Settings** > **Cellular** > **your phone number** and turn your cellular line off and on. If you're not using an eSIM, remove the SIM card from your phone and put it back in.
- **Update your iPhone.** If the software has a bug, it may be causing issues with your cellular service. To check for a software update, go to **Settings** > **General** > **Software Update**. You'll need internet for this to work, so Wi-Fi would be your only option if you can't connect to cellular.
- **Reset your network settings**. WARNING: This will reset all your Wi-Fi networks and passwords, cellular settings and VPN settings, so only do this if you've tried all of the above first. If you're fine with that, go to **Settings** > **General** > **Transfer or Reset iPhone** > **Reset** > **Reset Network Settings**.

Try restarting your iPhone, turning Cellular Data off and on and checking for any software updates.
Nelson Aguilar/CNET

Lastly, if network connection issues persist, Apple suggests contacting your phone carrier in case there are issues with your carrier or account that could be affecting your service, like outages in your area or an unpaid account.

If you're traveling internationally, and get stuck on SOS when you arrive, make sure that data roaming is enabled. You can go to **Settings** > **Cellular** > **your phone number** and toggle on **Data Roaming**.

For more, learn everything we know about the upcoming iPhone 16.

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