


BlackBerry – The Features


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Last month we talked about the models of BlackBerry available from different carriers and what you might look for in choosing a specific unit. This month we will cover the features that come standard with each unit.


Summary of Standard Features


The BlackBerry comes preloaded with the following standard features:


Email  - This single reason for the BlackBerry's enormous success is its ability to send and receive email in real time, without the need to dial in periodically. This constant on feature separates the BlackBerry from all but the most recent PDA devices.


Phone  - The BlackBerry is a full featured phone system. You can use a BlackBerry as your standard cell phone combined with its other PDA functions. For example, if someone sends you an email message with a phone number included in that message, you can dial that number directly by scrolling to it and selecting the 'call' option.


Contacts  - The contact manager is full featured allowing you to store a business and home address, up to 8 phone numbers, web and email information as well as up to 4 items of your choosing.


Calendar  - The calendar allows you to book appointments. If your company has a BlackBerry Server, it also allows calendar appointments to be synchronized in real time and for you to invite others to appointments directly from the BlackBerry.


Internet  - There are two internet browsers provided, one from your carrier (eg. Rogers, Bell or Telus) and one from BlackBerry. I have found the BlackBerry browser to be best personally, but each browser has its own pros and cons. The browser allows you to access most non-SSL encrypted (unsecured) Web sites on the internet.

Tasks  - This application is compatible with the task function in your desktop organizer. I have found that most people don't use tasks but if you are someone that like lists of things to do, this could be a great application for you.

Memopad  - The memopad is equivalent to the Notes feature in your desktop organizer. Use it to jot down notes of interest quickly and easily.

Alarm  - A basic, single alarm, alarm clock feature which can be turned off on the weekends if desired.

Calculator  - A four function memory calculator which can also handle metric to imperial conversions.

Search  - A search application that can search messages, calendar appointments, contacts, memos and tasks for a word or phrase of your choosing.

There are many other more minor features which improve usability on the BlackBerry. Some of these are discussed throughout this article.

Figure 1 shows a typical BlackBerry screen when it is first purchased.



Figure 1 - The BlackBerry Main Screen

Tip! If your BlackBerry does not have some of the features described above, it may be because you are not using the latest handheld and desktop software. For Rogers customers you can visit www.rogers.com/blackberry and choose Software Upgrades from the menu on the left. Locate your specific model of BlackBerry and download the updated Desktop and Handheld software. If you operate in an environment where a BlackBerry server is used, please consult your IT person before trying to perform these upgrades yourself. Upgrading a handheld results in no loss of data and takes about 30 minutes. You will not have access to your BlackBerry during the upgrade process. Upgrading the Desktop Manager program takes about 15 minutes.

Bell customers can go to www.bell.ca/wirelessemail and select the link Download BlackBerry Software.

The numbers below correspond to the numbers in Figure 1 above.

1. This area shows the signal strength for the cellular networks. The BlackBerry can send and receive emails with only one bar of signal available. To maintain an adequate conversation 2-3 bars are required at minimum.

Specific to Rogers: The letters GPRS should be capitalized in order for the BlackBerry to send and receive data (such as email messages and browsing the internet). Any other letters will allow cellular phone calls to be made, but will not facilitate data transfers.

Note! The newest BlackBerry's operate on the EDGE network and will show an EDGE designation at the bottom of the BlackBerry screen. The EDGE network provides faster Internet and email access and is rated between 100 and 300kps.

Specific to Bell: The designation 1X will appear when the BlackBerry can send and receive data. The designation 1x will appear when only voice calls can be placed or received, but no data.

Note! The newest BlackBerry's operate on the EV-DO network and will show an EV-DO designation somewhere on the BlackBerry screen. The EV-DO network provides broadband Internet and email access to the BlackBerry and is rated between 400 and 700kps - enough to handle streaming video such as live television. The deployment of the network combined with Blackberry devices to support it is expected in June 2006.

2. This icon shows you how many new messages have arrived that you have not yet read. Another icon, not shown, will show you how many phone calls were missed.
3. This icon shows your battery strength. The battery is charged through the same USB cable that allows synchronization with your desktop organizer to occur.
4. These are the icons that represent the various functions available on the Blackberry, some of which were described briefly above.

Quick Buttons

Figure 2 shows a basic colour version of the BlackBerry - likely one of the most popular models in circulation today. The USB port is used to synchronize the information stored in Microsoft Outlook or one of the other supported programs such as GroupWise, Lotus Organizer or Act, to name a few.

USB - When the unit is set up correctly, attaching the supplied USB cable to the BlackBerry automatically initiates the synchronization process making it very easy to ensure that your BlackBerry's data matches that of your desktop organizer software. The USB cable also recharges the BlackBerry.




Figure 2 - A Basic Colour BlackBerry

Headset - The headset port allows you to use the supplied headset to answer, conduct and hang up on calls. Most colour BlackBerry's also come with a technology called Bluetooth which allows the use of a wireless headset, but more on that in the next article.

Phone - The Phone button provides immediate access to the phone interface on the BlackBerry.

Wheel - The wheel is used for navigation and selection. When the wheel is scrolled up and down, it moves between available options. When the wheel is pushed in it selects and performs the currently selected option.

Tip! When on any BlackBerry option screen where you can select from a series of options, press the Alt key  and scroll the wheel to save time and steps in selecting your desired option. You must hold down the Alt key for it to function.

Escape - This key performs many functions. In the browser, press it to go 'Back' one screen. In an option screen press it to 'Escape' without saving. When on a phone call, press and hold this key to 'Hang up' the call.

Other Keys of Note

There are other keys that perform special functions on the BlackBerry. They are:



The Shift key selects the upper functions on each of the keys. For example, Shift+H produces a colon. Note that unlike a regular keyboard, you don't need to hold down the shift key. It automatically shifts the next letter pressed.



The Symbol key will display a set of symbols that can be used while typing. For example, common symbols not on the keyboard but accessible through this key include the \$ (on the Z key), the & (on the L key) and the % (on the P key).



If you want all of your type to be in CAPITAL LETTERS, press the Shift key and then this key.



This is the Enter key. It performs the same function as the enter key on your computer.

Application Tips

For those who already have a Blackberry, here are some tips that might save you time.

Mail

- To delete mail prior to a specific date, highlight the date, push the wheel in and select Delete Prior.
- To delete mail on your desktop at the same time that you delete them from the handheld choose from the wheel menu, Options, Email Reconciliation, Delete On: Mailbox & Handheld.
- To see mail from the previous day, choose P from the list of messages. To see mail from the next day, choose N.
- To search for all mail from a specific sender, highlight one message from that sender, push the wheel and then select the option Search Sender.
- To place a call to a sender already in your contacts list while reading mail, push the wheel and select Place Call. You will be given an option if there is more than one potential number to call for that contact.
- To file a message into one of your existing Outlook folders, highlight the message and choose, using the wheel, File. You may then scroll to the desired folder to file the message. If the folder has a + sign in front of it, choose the Expand option from the wheel menu to see the subfolders.

- To see the full email address of the sender, choose Show Address from the wheel menu.
- To open an attachment without scrolling to the bottom of a message highlight the words [1 attachment] and choose Open Attachment from the wheel menu.
- To reply to an open message, press R. To forward, press F.
- If you log phone calls and want to see just the phone calls in the message area, press Alt+P. Press Escape to return to normal view.

Contacts

- To locate a contact by first, last or company name, just start typing the letters of the desired name.
- To create an email group from your contacts, choose New Group from the wheel menu. Groups appear in bold in your contact list. Group emails are distributed to each member of the group.
- Sort your contacts by first, last or company name by choosing Options from the wheel menu.
- To filter your contacts by category filed, choose Filter from the wheel menu.

Calendar

- To advance or back up days at a time, hold down the Alt key and move the wheel.
- To go to a specific month, day or year, scroll left past the top of the calendar, through all the weekdays and over to the date. Highlight the portion of the date in accordance with where you want to go. Hold down the Alt key to scroll to the desired value. When you let go, the Calendar will be updated to that date.
- To adjust the time of an appointment (or any of the other options) use the Alt key plus the wheel to scroll through available options.
- If you are on a BlackBerry Server, invite others to your appointments using the Invite Attendee option. Accept or Decline appointments using the wheel menu.

Search

- Use the Search function to look for a person or text in a specific part of the BlackBerry. Enter the text or name you are looking for, select the area of

interest and then select Search from the wheel menu. The number of items found will be shown in brackets next to each area.

Menu

- Hide an underused menu icon by holding the Alt key, pushing the wheel and selecting Hide Application. You can also rearrange icons in the same fashion by choosing Move Application.

Phone

- While on a call use Add Notes, to make a note of the client that you are speaking to. The BlackBerry automatically tracks and logs the time of each call. For safety, we recommend using a headset if you are going to do this.
- Turn on call logging by selecting Options, Call Logging, All Calls from the wheel menu. Calls are logged in the mail section and are accompanied by a telephone icon. Any notes that you make are included in the call log.
- If you are on a call and want to place another call, select New Call from the menu. Note that the first caller will be able to hear you right up until the second call is initiated.
- To conference two callers together (one on hold and the other engaged) choose Join from the menu.
- To switch between two calls without joining them together choose Swap from the menu.
- Add a speed dial for those numbers you call most often. You can find this on the wheel menu. Note that you must be highlighting a previously dialed number to make it a speed dial. To use a speed dial, press and hold the letter corresponding to the speed dial.
- To program your voice mail into the BlackBerry choose Options, Voicemail. Place your voice mails back door number in Access Number. Be sure to enter it as a long distance number so that it will work from anywhere. In the Additional Numbers area, add all the digits and pauses needed to log into your mailbox. Pauses can be added from the wheel menu while on this field. To access voice mail from that point on, just select Call Voicemail from the wheel menu.

Conclusion

The BlackBerry is a very versatile PDA device. Hopefully some of the value has been provided in this article. Next month's article will look at one or two downloadable applications for the BlackBerry which you may find equally useful.

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