

BlackBerry's Imperfect Storm

Gene Marks

One small business owner shares his misadventures with the recently released smartphone from Research In Motion.

The beginning of the year brought about two very traumatic and similar events that affected my small business. I had my first colonoscopy. And I purchased a BlackBerry Storm.

I lost a day's worth of work prepping and getting the colonoscopy done. And I wasted many more days of productivity trying to use Research In Motion's (RIMM) Storm.

We've all seen the heavy promotions for the Storm. And many of my clients have asked me what I think. Originally, I thought that anything other than my last smartphone, the dreaded Palm (PALM) Treo 700p, would be an improvement. But that was not to be so.

Navigating Is Slow

I write not merely to rant about a poorly performing technology, but in hopes of helping small business owners like me avoid the same mistake I made. You very well may have had a different experience with the Storm. In fact, I hope yours has gone better, and I invite you to share it in the reader comment section below.

At first as I used the new touchscreen, clicking and sliding and scrolling, I kept saying "Wow!" And then things got annoying. As a business owner, I looked to the device to help me deal with stuff faster. I am used to using one hand to punch in names and send e-mails and text messages. The minute that I started using the Storm I felt like I had shifted down two gears. Navigating was slower. Finding stuff was slower. Using the touchscreen was slower. I hoped that things would get better as I got used to the device. Unfortunately, five weeks later it wasn't much better.

I never got the hang of the touchscreen keyboard. And I've got skinny fingers. Because I couldn't feel the keys, I found myself typing, backspacing, typing, backspacing, and retyping again until I finally got spellings right. Typos and errors were commonplace. This was not a good image to give to customers.

Touchscreen Too Sensitive

I also found the device doing things without my permission. Because of the touchscreen's layout, my chin kept launching the speakerphone every third time I made a call. Sometimes my cheek inadvertently pushed the mute button. Private conversations were suddenly heard by everyone around me. Clients on the other end couldn't hear what I was saying. I never got used to the touchscreen's sensitivity.

Another unpleasant attribute I encountered was in network coverage. In areas of my office where the network of my provider, Verizon Wireless, is weak, I was unable to connect my device to our company's wireless network in order to make or receive calls. So to use my Storm I had to walk to other places in my office with a stronger signal. That limitation was a pain in the neck.

From a feature standpoint, the Storm was really no big deal. Its browser is nicer, but any normal person will ultimately go blind looking at that little screen for too long. It had many of the same features as my hated Treo—Web access so I can check baseball scores and get directions, text messaging, a few games to while away the time in a customer's waiting room. I'm told that the camera had more pixels, but as a business owner that's kind of a low priority.

All in all, and like the actual colonoscopy, I found any extra bells and whistles to be a big yawn.

The good news is that both stories—my colonoscopy and the Storm—have a happy ending. I got a clean bill of health. As for my Storm, well, I replaced it with a BlackBerry Curve a few days ago. The Curve is a great phone for a business owner like me. The little trackball makes navigating fast, fast, fast. I can now use one hand to look up numbers, text employees, and call customers—all while driving down the turnpike! The people at Verizon Wireless were sympathetic to my frustrations and only fleeced me out of another \$150. The BlackBerry service is excellent. I'm now a happy camper. And the Storm has blown over.

Gene Marks, CPA, is the owner of the Marks Group, which sells customer relationship, service, and financial management tools to small and midsize businesses. Marks is the author of four best-selling small business books and writes the popular "Penny Pincher's Almanac" syndicated column. He frequently speaks to business groups on penny-pinching topics. More penny-pinching advice from Marks can be found at www.quickerbetterwiser.com.

Business Week, New York, 29 jan. 2009, Technology, online. Disponível em <www.businessweek.com>. Acesso em: 2 fev. 2009.

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais