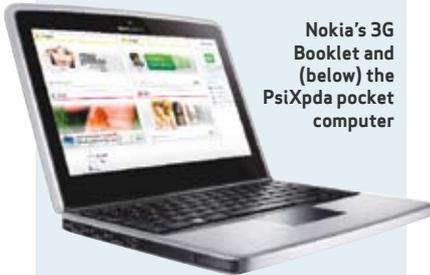


businesstrends

Small wonders Handy new computers



Nokia's 3G Booklet and (below) the PsiXpda pocket computer

While the world apparently goes iPad crazy, it's worth drawing your attention to a couple of other mini-computers-cum-smartphones that are perfect for business travellers. Take the Nokia 3G Booklet, which isn't a smartphone but has a SIM slot, accelerometer and GPS built in – rather like most recent launches in this category, including the iPhone and Nokia's own N97. The Booklet's 10.1in screen, reduced-size chiclet keyboard, Atom processor and 1GB RAM clearly put it in netbook territory, but at €725 – around double the price of other netbooks – it will appeal to those business travellers who want something slim, brushed aluminium (rather like the Apple Macbook Pro models) and a sexy glass screen. Nokia claims a battery life of 12 hours, and the Booklet weighs just 1.25kg. It also runs Windows 7.

Alternatively, it's definitely worth checking out the new PsiXpda (psixpda.com), a powerful and stylish Psion-like device that's billed as 'your ultimate pocket computer'. It's roughly two-thirds shorter than most netbooks, and weighs just 430g. In fact, it may just be the best €500 you've ever spent.



Thienpont poses with another of Belgium's heroes

Working for a brighter future Eminent scientist explains why photonics has such potential

Hugo Thienpont is a scientist with a soft side. Currently chair of the Applied Physics and Photonics department at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and a potential candidate for the Nobel Prize, he has his sights firmly fixed on creating a safer world. Speaking to *b.there!* before the SPIE Photonics Europe event, to be held at the Square Conference Centre in Brussels from 12-16 April, he explains the world of photonics, and how he's spearheading the programme to link academic research in this field with industry.

"On a very simple level, photonics is a unique technology that uses light to address today's cultural difficulties," Thienpont says. He continues in the context of global warming: "We all know what it is, but solving it is a very different matter. We need to develop more efficient lighting, and we can do this with photonics. With LEDs (light-emitting diodes) we can reduce the amount of electrical power we use and still create the same amount of optical light, and they are more durable – lasting 50,000 hours rather than an old bulb's capacity of 1,000-2,000 hours – so we need to replace them less often."

Thienpont expands by talking about projects in Africa: "We're trying to make devices that detect *E. coli* in water. Hundreds of thousands die a year from this bacteria, so if we can make low-cost components that, using light and optical spectroscopy, can detect it, people will know the when water isn't safe."

The technology even has applications for our everyday shopping. "We are finding more frequently that food sold at a high price might actually be rubbish," says Thienpont. "Take olive oil, for example. We are currently developing micro-systems that could be integrated into your mobile phone, along with the relevant software, that would allow you to analyse whether the olive oil was from Umbria or Greece, or whether it was a mixture of olive oil and lower-quality oils." He adds that this is possible by passing light through the sample, and the software will then analyse the spectrum it receives back.

Speaking about his aim for the forthcoming Photonics Europe event, Thienpont says he wants to convey the message to industry that optics and photonics is the technology of the future. "We need to bring together industry, entrepreneurs and those that can provide funding to solve the challenges that we face. We need to extend the functionality of today's products and make the technology ubiquitous; it's about lowering the cost and improving the quality of life." photoniceurope.org