

High Tech

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PRO ON THE GO

*Technology at her fingertips keeps
Austin professional in touch*



Photos by Walter Brewer

Austin writer Emily Sopensky uses all the latest gadgets, including her Motorola MicroTAC phone, above, to keep up with what's going on in the world. At top right, she holds her key chain of the future with car remote-entry transmitter, bar code access card and Mobil gas transponder. At lower right is her PalmPilot she uses to keep her phone numbers, schedules and to-do lists at her fingertips.

By Emily Sopensky
Special to this section

Maybe you hadn't noticed, but there's a revolution going on — and you can hold it in your hand. The technology storm that is Austin's moniker and economic ace is also at your fingertips.

Just take a look inside one average Austin consumer's bag — mine. Like most of us, I spend a lot of time on the go — whether it's in and around Austin, Texas or the country.

The technology tools that I've accumulated to keep me in touch with my personal and business life keep getting lighter in weight and easier to use.

Let's start with what's on my key ring.

Most of us are familiar with remote-entry systems for cars. Across the street from your car, you can press a button and the driver's door unlocks. Walk away from the car while pressing another button and it locks. Don't forget the panic button that sets

off a noise to wake the dead — and deter ne'er-do-wells.

Next on my key chain is a plastic doodad with a bar code on it. Entry to my fitness center is not only essential to my well-being, but also to my disposition remaining pleasant. I hand the



PalmPilot

bar-coded tag to Jamie at the door of Body Business. She swipes it through the reader attached to the PC, and smiles as she greets me by name — which pops up on the monitor screen in case she



Key chain with car remote-entry transmitter

Purse reveals microcosm of technology

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forgets. She's always delighted to see me — of course — but I'm sure she is also smiling because she can quickly tell that my account is paid up.

The transaction takes only seconds and inconveniences no one. Because I always have my car keys, I also always have this tag. I have no excuses; I can always breeze in to exercise. On the other end there's a solid business rationale for the system. Body Business co-owner Susan Cooper says, "We invested in the barcode system for security and convenience — to us and to our clients."

The little black cylinder on my keychain I use when pumping gas from specially equipped Mobil gas stations. Not only does this little transponder gadget use a low level radio frequency to turn on the pump when I hold it within range of the pumpface, but it enables the transaction to be billed automatically to my credit card account. I don't have to struggle to locate my cash or credit card, pull it out, and hand it to the clerk inside or swipe it at the pump. Using the transponder, the link takes under a second. The best part of the deal is the transponder is free to anyone who signs up for it with Mobil.

"Once they find out about

it, customers love it," says Mike Coleman, manager of TETCO Mobil on FM 1325. Other gas companies are lining up to introduce this technology, because, as Mobil found out in a study they did several years ago, customers care most about getting in and out of a gas station as fast as possible.

Back in my bag, my cell phone is ringing. A lunch date has to postpone. While many of my colleagues are switching to digital PCS cell phones, I'm not switching until service is more even across the country.

I've invited a third person to our lunch date that was just postponed, so I pull out my PalmPilot to look up her phone number and to change my calendar. I have over 2000 names, addresses and phone numbers on this palm-sized revolution. And it easily synchronizes with changes I make to the database I have stored on my PC at work.

When it comes to name recognition, this nifty device barely has competition. Just like "Xerox" became synonymous a few years ago with "make a copy," PalmPilot is becoming synonymous with PDA (personal digital assistant), which are devices that hold vital information like phone numbers, schedules, and to-do lists. PalmPilots may not be replacing all the laptops

being lugged onto airplanes, but it's compact affordable size makes it a lot easier to tote — and a lot kinder to sore shoulder muscles.

John Ellett, president of The Ellett Group, and former VP of marketing for Dell and Power Computing, swears by his PalmPilot. "I'm not an early adopter of technology. In fact I just upgraded to Windows 95 last week. But having the Pilot always with me lets me schedule meetings with high tech companies in New York one day, Austin the next, and California the following day and still see all my sons basketball games."

Many of us who work with or for high tech companies gain access to their offices with some kind of card key entry. This one has my picture on it and an embedded magnetic stripe.

By swiping the card through a reader attached to office entry ways I can get in without waiting for someone to return from coffee break to unlock the door for me. The computer that verifies that I am cleared to enter also records my entry and exits for security audits.

For buildings that house more than one company, such cards are often keyed to allow access to only certain floors when using the

elevator. Besides the mag stripe or barcoded entry systems, some personnel access systems use biometrics to ID an individual. Biometric systems often use fingerprints or palmprints. RFID (radio frequency identification) technology similar to that used with the gas pump interface is becoming more common for personnel also used for access systems. Some systems combine techniques and technologies. For example, entry to the 1996 Olympics by participants and staff used a combination of biometrics and RFID.

As a writer who wants to document her subject and as someone who just has to capture the moment, I'm in love with my little APS (Advanced Photo System) camera. With a flick of my finger it takes a panoramic shot, a 4x6 or a 4x7 picture. Another flick, and I zoom in or out on my subject. A truly point-and-click camera, this APS photo-shooter is also easy to load single-handedly because the film comes in tiny specialized film capsules.

Fundamentally, technology is here to stay. Products can only get better and easier to use. My bag, like many pockets, briefcases and purses in Austin, holds a variety of technology applications that make my life on the go a little bit easier.