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COMMUNICATIONS

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Web site: <http://www.phrannie.org>

Note: Some basics for people getting started, then some more detailed stuff for people wanting to do more, then some mixed info, then some really good web sites and sources.

CELLULAR PHONES FOR RV USE -- The basics for absolutely necessary stuff.

People who live in a fixed home base can easily obtain a cellular phone. Free phones, free minutes of airtime and other so-called "giveaways" are available (at varying costs). Service and billing, often through their home phone and local phone company is simplified since the phone company can easily pursue them for payment.

RoVers are in a somewhat different situation. For the bare necessities, they don't need a cheap "free" cell phone with limited functions. They need a cell phone that has a large battery and can be plugged directly into the RV's 12 volt battery system. They need an auxiliary antenna connection so a better antenna can be mounted on the RV roof. In most cases, if RoVing, they do not need the so-called "free" minutes of local air time. RoVers don't necessarily want a "local" cell provider (that they might have to call when there's a problem at commercial long-distance rates), but want one that can be reached by a free cell call or (800) number nation wide. Most RoVers seldom use a cell phone. They want one available though, for emergencies.

Some RoVers do want full-fledged cell communications. They want to make (and receive) frequent calls and they want to use the internet (see later for frequent use).

"EMERGENCY" cell phone services at reduced rates (usually well under \$15 a month) are intended for just that -- emergency use like vehicular breakdown in isolated areas.

What you get for that is "access" to the cell system. Your phone number is always tied in to the system and all you have to do is turn on

the power or lift the handset and dial your emergency road service number, etc. (Dialing procedures vary slightly depending on your cell server and will be explained to you when you sign up and get your phone programmed.) There are some cell phones available really cheap, that only connect to the (911) in whatever area you're in. You don't want one. When you blow a doolie, (911) isn't going to be amused by your plea for road service. Technically, any cell phone, even if not subscribed to a service, should allow access to (911).

You will be billed for "Airtime" (the minutes you're actually using the phone). If you selected an emergency plan you usually won't have any "free" minutes each month and that's OK. You can expect air time in your local area to be about 30¢ (roughly) a minute; roaming will cost more plus normal long distance charges. When roaming, some providers charge an extra "Roaming Activation" or similarly termed fee (\$1 to 3) when you use the phone in a roaming area. In almost all cases, this fee covers a 24-hour period so you don't get ripped off for multiple calls. Remember, long distance charges when you use your calling card are billed separately and have nothing to do with the cell charges.

"Roaming" charges apply to any call you make from outside your "Home" area. Fortunately, you can pick your own "anywhere" home phone area when you subscribe. In my case, as an example, my cell phone is listed and billed to my TX address but was programmed to have a local number and "Home" area in Colorado, where I spend most of my time. Your "Home" area will usually include other portions of the state (sometimes more than one state) as a local area, without you having to pay for "Roaming." This local area varies with the cell provider and is another thing you need to check when shopping for a service. Most of these extended local areas follow urban corridors and major highways, so they are rather narrow. In many cases, calling from an Interstate highway corridor and just a few miles from that highway, is the difference between local and roaming. Your provider can furnish you a list or map of covered areas.

Roaming is not complicated if you pay attention. Some people, for example, think that if they're far from home (roaming), they can call local numbers in that same area they're actually in at no extra charge. Not so. Even if calling just across the street, if you're outside your "Home" area,

you'll pay the full bore for long distance.

You pay for incoming as well as outgoing calls on cell phones. For an additional fee (about \$3 a month) you can often get a "Caller Pays" option (people who call you pay for the call.) There's good news and bad news in doing this. Good: if some mass marketer gets through to you, keep him on the phone for an hour. Bad: your relatives might have conniptions when they get their phone bills. Actually, most cell services now warn callers of the fee, so this seldom happens anymore.

Some RoVers, as those still working, must have a cell and must answer incoming calls. Smart RoVers who have no real reason to answer the phone--don't.

Ordinarily, you should never give your cell phone number to anyone. (Unless, as above, you deliberately intend to answer calls.) Usually not even the close relative who is to notify you of a death or similar. Why? Because your cell phone, like a regular phone, can receive wrong numbers, mass marketers, etc. If you have given the number to "family," then you'll have to answer when it rings, even if it's some boob. There is a way around this: When on the road have a ring code arranged with a family person for emergencies. When they call, they let it ring an agreed number of times, then hang up. (They would do this at one or more prearranged times of day.) You just count rings and know it's time to find a regular phone. Not perfect, but the primary reason for having a cell phone is so you can call out, not so that people can call in. If you must keep in touch for family "stuff," it's easier and cheaper just to regularly call home on a regular phone.

Obviously, unless you're a big spender, you do not use a cell phone for frivolous purposes or casual conversation with friends and relatives. Ordinarily, you do not use a cell phone for Internet access either. A typical exception is just to download "e-mail," which can be done in just a minute or two if you know what you're doing. (see later.)

Most cell emergency-type services assign you an independent phone number that has little to do with your house phone (if you have one), except having a home phone allows them to track you down, demand payment and cut off home phone and cell service if you don't pay. As a

RoVer with no home phone, expect your provider to possibly (but seldom) demand a hefty deposit, possibly (again seldom) run a credit check on you or demand (usually) a credit card number. This may seem annoying, but it's understandable if you consider how easily they could get screwed by a crook.

Most of the really bare bones emergency cell plans will cost less than \$10 a month for the basic fee. It's to the cell provider's advantage to automatically charge your credit card each month. They save on billing forms, postage and such and keep your fee low. It's to your advantage as well. You don't have to worry about a lost bill or paying on time, or writing a check and there's no postage.

Many RoVers hesitate to provide a credit card number. There's no danger in this if you subscribe with a reputable company. You will not receive a monthly statement. Ideally, you won't need one, because there won't be any charge other than your minimal monthly fee unless you make calls. Your cell provider will tell you what approximate fees are per each initiated call, air time per minute, etc. Keep track of any calls, and if there's a wide disparity in your estimate or their bill, call their free 800 number and request a statement. No big deal.

Cell For Frequent Users -- Especially Internet Users.

Most of the above applies. However, you'll need a cell phone that is capable of being "cabled" to your computer so you can connect with your modem. See Information Sources at the end of this sheet for web sites that compare phones available. You'll need to check the interconnecting cable requirements carefully (or you'll get the wrong one and they can be expensive). You'll also need a "cell-capable" modem (not just any modem). This can be a bit expensive and a bit confusing. Many new users screw it all up by not researching the proper phone(s) and letting some uninformed sales person sell them something that won't work.

Services, Rates and means of Access -- Can vary widely for heavy cell users. ATT and several others have some Rate plans that can be attractive (though not inexpensive). The coverage area is quite extensive also, though still a bit skimpy in certain places. A number of users report problems with ATT requirements and billing practices (complaining that

ATT hassles them if too many calls are made away from home area, etc.). This is somewhat reminiscent of the ignorance on the part of satellite TV providers that people have run into -- see later. Recently, the ATT administrative fol-de-rol seems to be slackening off though. (See "the "RV Club" below.)

For Detailed Info: At the end of this poopsheet there is a list of web sites that you can check to insure you get the right stuff. Do all this BEFORE you spend big \$. Some of the sites sell equipment as well as provide info. All are known to be reliable. Some have comparisons of as many as 200+ cell phones that can help. Some also compare the many cell service providers and their plans. Some have detailed explanations of areas actually covered.

For The Best Personal (real life) Info: You REALLY need to join the "RV Club" (www.rvclub.com). This is a VERY active club and is only \$10 a year. Subscribe to their Full Timer [FT] forum (among others and there's no extra charge) and you can ask questions and get lots of quick responses from those people who are really out there "doin' it" with cell phones and other innovations on the internet. Most highly recommended.

WARNING: Modern day (today) communications, be it by cell, other forms of wireless, satellite or whatever, changes almost daily.

SHOPPING FOR A CELL PROVIDER/SERVICE

They're all over the country. Check the newspapers and Yellow Pages. You're looking for a provider that has lots of offices (or a nation-wide capability with a free cell number and 800-type toll-free number). You don't want a little Mom'nPop outfit that serves only a limited area.

Question them about costs and features available under their various plans. Remember, you might not be interested in free phones, free minutes and all that jazz. Many of us just want a bare-bones system for emergencies! Hopefully we'll seldom or never use it. If you do, you'll be willing to pay the extra charges.

Quiz them about "programming" the phone--their ability to bill to one place and assign home area to another, etc. Often, programming will be done at one of their offices when you sign up and pay initial fees. This can be convenient, with them doing all the button punching for you, but can

get screwed up if the sales person in the office doesn't know what he/she is doing. (Kind of like expecting a car salesman to actually fix your car.)

You can buy a cell phone anyplace. You can select a provider from anyplace. You can call their (800) number, arrange for the service you want (contract) and they'll guide you through the steps. You'll receive a contract in the mail. Sign it, if you agree with it, and return or call their (800) with further questions. Pay initial charges by check if in no hurry or use credit card and they'll activate the phone immediately and talk you through the programming button punching if you're not in an office. It's not difficult at all.

Make sure you can call the national office, free, from anywhere so they can remotely reprogram the phone if necessary. One of my phones once lost track of its home area. Just a little computer glitch at their end. I took the cell phone to a regular phone and called their (800). They did whatever it is they do on the computer on their end then had me turn on the cell phone and punch some buttons. No big deal. It could have been a big deal if I'd had to do all this commercial long distance with some little Mom'nPop.

Again, providers can sell phones or you can provide your own. Do NOT get a chintzy little phone for RoVing. Ideally, for emergency use, you'll: Get one with connections for outside/RV roof antenna and auxiliary connection to your RV "house" batteries.

Don't get into the "free" phone nonsense. You'll just get a chintzy phone, often won't be able to reach anyone, will have to contract for the "free" minute stuff and will be disappointed. (How else could they give you a "free" phone? TANSTAAFL -- There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch.) However, there are legitimate rebates and some can be attractive -- use your consumer shopping smarts.

(We use two cell phones. One in motor home for RoVing with antenna on roof. Small, inexpensive phone in car for use in "Home" area that has good cell access. On the road, driving both vehicles, cell phones can be useful when you get separated and are--as usual--out of CB radio range.) Here's one little tip that I almost screwed up: I was going to have both cell phones assigned the same number for convenience -- until a

knowledgeable phone guy reminded me I wouldn't be able to call one from the other. Pretty obvious after thinking about it.

I pay under \$15 for basic cell service. A typical roaming call to arrange for emergency road service totals \$6 to \$10 more. Sounds expensive now, but when you're many miles from help, it's very reasonable. (Walking miles down a highway ain't no fun unless you're into physical fitness.)

My cell provider has offices in many cities (many do). You can subscribe to many services without having to go to an office. You should get their info packet and use it to compare the offerings of the other services when you shop. Use normal consumer skills when selecting one.

THE INTERNET FOR MOBILE USE

Nothing like "ordinary" cell phones, but, similar. There are some different techniques when RoVers use the Internet.

First some basics for newbies:

The Internet is a realm--like an "electronic world." The World Wide Web (that www.stuff.com etc., you see everywhere), is just one part of the "world" of the Internet. "Microsoft Internet Explorer" and "Netscape" are just two of the many browsers that allow you maximum access to the whole world through the www after you've subscribed to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to get on line in the first place. "Online Services" are private companies that allow you to access certain features of the web, but not all. As private online services get bigger and better, with more services, ISPs are also adding more services. As the services grow, distinctions get fuzzy.

The first thing you'll need to access this "world" is a modem for your computer to connect you through a phone. That might sound pretty basic, but (no kidding) some people think a computer does this with some kind of "magic" through the commercial power line.

Next is an ISP (Internet Service Provider). These are outfits you subscribe to that furnish you a way to get into the Internet. None are perfect and some are lousy. You need one with a nation-wide POP (Point Of Presence). This means that you'll be able to use local phone numbers, almost anywhere, to access your ISP and you won't have to keep resubscribing and changing your e-mail address.

Some ISPs provide a "browser." **You need a browser** program to use (or browse) through the Internet itself. Some ISPs provide their own browser that you **MUST** use (not too swell). Others provide access to the "net" and will offer a selection (usually the two major browsers -- Internet Explorer and Netscape -- that you can get on a CD). Nice, because it takes you through the installation and does all the confusing stuff. One thing you want to insure, when selecting an ISP, is that you can select and use a third-party browser that **you** find on your own. (You don't want to be a slave to some outfit.)

You might shop for an ISP (if you don't already have one) by checking the Yellow Pages, but that's a mistake because they usually list locals and just some of the nation-wide outfits. A better way is getting someone who has online access to go to a "Search Engine." (They'll know what it is if you don't.) Type in "ISP" and go "Search." You'll see hundreds listed with the territory they cover. Start shopping. An easy way to find an adequate ISP for RoVing is to ask what other RoVers are using (but you shouldn't do this casually, because many RVers really know very little about the internet and are just using what some other dummy sold them).

How do you find a *good* ISP?

There are thousands of them. Some are for businesses and some are little rinky-dink locals that won't be of much use to travelers. You want a big one with nation-wide access at a reasonable price. The easiest way to find a suitable one is to get on someone's computer and visit something like <http://thelist.internet.com/areacode.html>. You'll find over 4,000 ISPs arranged by area code and city. Look for a major city (Chicago is good). Scroll down through the ISP names. The ISPs you're looking for will have an enormous amount of area codes listed. Click on the ISP's name and it will link you to the ISP site that explains features, costs, special stuff and more (like what kind of modems they support, wireless access, etc.). "Earthlink" is just one example of a super-good ISP. Good price, good features, seldom "down" with a problem, fast/instant response to calls for assistance on their 800# and no less than 2,200 local (free) phone numbers you can use to access it in the U.S.

USING THE NET ON THE ROAD

Important: Once you're signed up with an ISP, then, **BEFORE YOU LEAVE**

"Home" (or wherever you happen to be), go on the Internet to your ISP. Look for "SUPPORT" or some similar tab. Find the "POP INFO," "ACCESS NUMBERS AND STATUS" or similarly-named menu list and look up POP phone numbers for your likely future locations. (You could print out the whole POP list, but with a good service it will be quite lengthy.)

The reason you do this BEFORE leaving home is because if you don't, and drive outside your local phone area, then when you plug in at a new location and go to your browser, you will automatically connect to your previous phone number and may find yourself on commercial long distance.

How do you connect your modem to a temporary phone?

If you have a lap-top computer it's easy. Just carry it to a convenient phone where you're visiting and plug in your modem cord. Assure the people you're visiting that it's just a local call (if it is). Also, keep in mind that the line is going to be "busy" to all incoming calls while you're using it, so be considerate. Generally, this method is primarily for e-mail and what most RoVers do is quickly download e-mail (I get over 20 normal messages in about 1 minute), get off Internet and reconnect phone. Compose responses, reconnect and get back on line and upload outgoing e-mail.

If you've got a big computer and can't carry it in? Many RoVers get a very l-o-n-g telephone extension cord. Some, few, new pay phones have a modem plug-in built in. There are also ways to temporarily "tap" some telephones and their connection boxes.

You might use an "acoustic coupler" that you can clamp on the handset of a phone for use with a modem plug. Where do you find an "Acoustic Coupler" that clamps on to the hand set of a telephone (when you can't disconnect the phone and plug your modem in--as with a pay phone)? You can call around to computer stores. Most don't carry them. You might check with "Konexx" who manufactures the most common one at (800) 275-6354 (www.konexx.com). Better, check the Information Sources at the end of this sheet. Note: Acoustic Couplers will really slow down the flow of data. (To be expected from a thing that straps to a handset with velcro.) However, some people who go into really remote areas often find

them indispensable. Others find them next to worthless.

Regular Internet use is done like e-mail, but you'll be on the phone longer and have to be more clever in finding one you can keep going awhile. All Internet ISPs are busy and slow at times. Very late at night and the wee hours of the morning are the best times to use them. Fortunately, these are the times phones are least likely to be used by others.

CAUTION! If you're in a commercial or office building. Many have internal telephone systems and the power on their telephone lines can fry your stuff. Make sure you check first.

Do you have to pay an ISP (Internet Service Provider) or other online service (like AOL) just to get e-mail?

No, IF, big IF, you're willing to settle for one of the minimal services that is supported by advertising. They will inundate you with all sorts of ash and trash advertising and can be slower than the second coming. TANSTAAFL. You really should get a "real" ISP account so you can get online from about any computer (assuming it's connected to a phone line).

Do you need your own computer at all if you're just interested in e-mail?

No, you don't. Business and airline travelers can easily go to a "computer kiosk" at convention centers and airports and use a computer to get "on line" free or at reasonable cost. Most cities now have so-called "cyber cafes" also. These are bars/restaurants/coffee shops/book stores/etc., that have computers also free or at reasonable cost. Many "quick copy" places have computers you can use for a fee (might get expensive at about \$10 a session in some?).

Best of all are public libraries! About any library has at least one computer, on line to the Internet, that anybody can use free. Get on, punch up your e-mail server, download and answer. Big libraries and busy libraries (near colleges) might have limited time periods and people waiting. Suburban libraries seldom have a wait. Many will let you stay on line as long as you like unless someone else shows up. Then it's first in and first out, perhaps limiting each user's time to 20 minutes. (But, unlike RV free parking, first out can come right back in when you're done.)

Computer users tend to be considerate and tell the guy they're replacing they'll only be a few minutes.

More on internet stuff:

Several readers (without a computer) are considering getting a lap top PC "just for e-mail."

The "just for" part bothers me. Lap tops aren't inexpensive. Using one just for e-mail is counter productive (unless you're a big spender). However, newer lap tops will allow you to do anything a desk top computer will. That would make sense. **No, you don't need a top-of-the-line lap top at \$5,000 or more**, though that's what they'll try to sell you. **No, you don't want some early, used antique for \$250 to \$450.** (Those turkeys won't have enough memory to run anything, even a basic operating system, and you'll just be disappointed.)

Decent new lap tops, that will have the current version of windows, plenty of memory, etc., and have CD ROM and modem built in are selling for about \$1,300-\$1,400. Dell and many other stores carry these. You **MUST** shop around or you'll screw up. One thing to do is get free catalogs from one or more of the better mail order houses. MicroWarehouse (800) 367-7080, PC Connection (800) 800-5555 and Tiger Direct (800) 888-4437 are three good ones. All list several major brands and models so you can compare features (against what the local store is peddling).

SATELLITE TV FOR RV USE

Again, somewhat different than when in a permanent location. Many of us have one of the 18" to 42" DBS/DSS systems. They work great. Most dealers sell basic antenna, receiver and remote for about the same price. The actual programming, from Direct TV, is also the same price from anybody. What's really important is WHO you deal with. You need an "RV SMART" dealer who knows the "angles" when using SATs in RVs. Most ordinary dealers know nothing more about the equipment than a car dealer does about what he peddles. The outrageous nonsense some (not all) of these people come up with can thoroughly screw up what should be a pleasant experience for RoVers if they're unaware.

Some examples from ordinary dealers who don't know anything:

"The SAT receiver must be connected to a telephone line." NOT TRUE (unless you want to order up things like pay-per-view direct from the remote control without moving from your easy chair). You can go to any phone, call the (800) of your program provider and do the same thing. (It might cost more.) Also, some regional sports packages require connection to a telephone.

"You can't move this once it's installed or the satellite will "know" and your programming will be cut off." Absolute hogwash!

"I can't sell you this unless you buy the programs from me also." More baloney. The only exception to this is when they offer a huge rebate on the equipment IF you also buy the programming. That's understandable, BUT, there are dealers who will sell you the equipment at reduced prices without programming. Shop around.

There's more: The "Big 8" (now 9) can be another problem. It refers to a programming option that allows receiving east and west coast channels of ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX plus a single channels of PBS. Perfect for RoVers so they can get major networks anywhere. Program providers aren't allowed to sell you this if you live in an area that gets reasonably-good TV broadcasts locally. (It has to do with "rules" agreed on because of advertising conflicts twixt SAT, local broadcast and Cable that there's no space for here.) Obviously, the bone heads that made the rules never thought things through. If you furnish the provider with a legitimate address in a substandard broadcast reception area, you qualify. Some providers, though, insist that programming must be based on the address shown on your driver's license, of all things. This is just absurd (for obvious reasons). Subscribe from someone else.

Satellite broadcast of some network and local programming in some areas of the country is now available. This can work for some people, but do not confuse it with the nationwide "Big 9."

An "RV Smart" equipment dealer and/or program provider won't tell you the BS above (and there's a lot more nutty information floating around). An RV Smart dealer/provider WILL have accurate information and can advise you on how to qualify legitimately for the Big 9.

RV Smart dealers can do a lot of other tricks for your benefit also. I won't

go into all that here (some of it's a bit devious). Find a good dealer and ask. Good dealers won't do anything illegal, it's just that they know what they're doing and what can be done. (As opposed to ordinary dealers who don't know squat.)

The dealers that advertise in Escapees RV Magazine or attend Escapades are all "RV Smart." In fact, a good way to shop for a SAT is attend an Escapade. There will be at least two dealers with equipment you can put your hands on and play with. You can ask questions and get straight answers.

Lots of options are available as add-ons to the basic system (dual feed antennas, satellite locators, through the roof adjustable mounts, automatic electronic mounts and much more). Figure out what you really need.

Example: Permanent roof mounts can be nice, but what if you always park under the trees? Automatic mounts are nice, but pricey. (They find the SAT and you don't have to.) You may, or may not, want to spend more on accessories than you did for the SAT system itself. If you don't want to plunge for an automatic finder, make sure you get a SAT finder meter (about \$40) or similar indicator (they're often called marriage savers) to avoid all the yelling back and forth when setting up. (Joe Average, in a house, sets his up once. You'll do it often.)

WHAT'S NEW; WHAT'S COMING? (In all categories)

Some of it's already here. Dual-feed satellite antennas are nothing new for TV. One new model, "Direcpc" (which is similar to, but not the same as the Directv) allows you to access incoming Internet (and the "dual" version allows TV and internet. Supposedly, this is swell for receiving/downloading without a phone. (**Unfortunately**, you'll still have to use a phone to communicate with the satellite, so it's really not all that swell.) See later for some really big cautions on Direcpc!

Two-way communications directly through a Satellite, no "outside" phone service needed at all, are available but very costly (up to \$5,000 plus SAT air time) and usually used only by professionals in remote areas.

Globalstar www.globalstar.com now has an improved system. The phone works as a usual cell phone does **OR** direct to satellite (as a hand held or in a cradle for mounting in boat or vehicle with a small, unidirectional remote antenna). This is exciting! It's not cheap, but their web site has an easy "search" for local dealers.

Eventually, equipment will improve, prices will come down and you'll have a tiny antenna and small receiver/transmitter for TV, Internet, e-mail and phone. How soon? Who knows? (We're still waiting for the improved 12 volt batteries that were to have been available well over two years ago.)

Direcpc: www.direcpc.com (for internet) or www.directv.com (for TV) will provide info on their equipment and service plans.

BUT, before you decide to order, do yourself a big favor and visit the newsgroup (not a web site) at **alt.satellite.direcpc** for some VERY CRITICAL COMMENTS from the people who are actually using "direcpc." This is important! Check it out.

Better two-way small dish coming soon?

"Hughes," maker of Direct TV and Direct PC, plans to have true two-way communications by "about" 2003. The sloppy job they've done so far with Direct TV and their management of Direct PC (as pointed out by their users at "alt.satellite.direcpc") makes a lot of people wonder.

Some Wireless advances are also interesting. Some wireless outfits are pretty much limited to large metropolitan areas only (and will tell you that if you tell them you'll be travelling all over). Things are improving all the time though.

BUT, you can now get a wireless modem and wireless IP service from "**Novatel**." This service allows direct "piggybacking" of your web and e-mail through a small radio transmitter modem, over the air where it "rides or piggybacks" on cell networks without having to use a cell phone or do all the dialing, etc. The data it sends is called "Cellular Digit Pocket Data" and sends your activity in short "bursts" so there's more speed than with cell phones and less interference. You subscribe to a service like ATT or others that can handle "CDPD" to use it. This is an exciting concept, but it will be a long time before it's available in other than major urban areas, so it'll be a while before it's useful in the "boondocks." Check at www.novatelwireless.com for info on the "Sage" and other models.

In the Interim:

And we are in an interim stage now, so what are people doing?

- Most, but not all, are: Still using cell phones for just the basic necessities. Running a phone line from the RV or hauling the lap-top to a phone for internet and e-mail.
- More and more are: Biting the bullet and using a cell phone (the phones and services keep getting better). The "package" deals like ATT One Rate and others are not cheap, but many serious users feel they're reasonable enough.
- Some RVers have started using "**Pocket Mail**" as an e-mail-only sender/receiver. Pocket Mail uses a device much like an acoustic coupler but with e-mail features and a tiny keyboard built in. It's slow and messages are limited to only 4kb. It does work and is relatively inexpensive for now. (Info at www.pocketmail.com.)

The "interim" (before all the new stuff get's shaken out) is going to last at least 2 years. Not everybody wants to be on the "leading edge" and spend big\$ (sometimes referred to as being on the "bleeding edge") if it's not essential. For what it's worth, I'm going to wait and see what happens before I plunge for big\$. Fortunately, I park for long periods where there's good telephone access. When doing driving days, I use Pocket Mail just to keep up with what may be important. For regular calls I use my credit card. I'm also lucky to have a home base with phone and computer and someone there to download all my e-mail (a lot) and hold it for me. Long, technical messages can be divided up in "less than 4kb parts" and sent to me by Pocket Mail if needed. It works for me and will do for a while.

Some Really Good Information Sources:

- Road News** www.roadnews.com A good site. Lots of info on how to "patch in" to existing telephones, etc., and all sorts of other tricky stuff. How to tell if you can safely plug in. Much more.
- Road Warrior** www.warrior.com Has equipment and a lot of good advice and info. (This web address now takes you to www.igoproducts.com where Road Warrior has it's own tab.
- /Go.com** www.igo.com Portable and lap top specialists. Telecoupler, wireless modems, overseas adapters, huge array of better batteries.

Sites below all sell equipment, but also provide a *wealth* of info:

- **Point.com** www.point.com Excellent comparison search for details on service plans and phones. Good tips.
- **Cell Mania** www.cellmania.com More great comparison info.
- **Get Connected** www.getconnected.com The *full* range of communications devices of all sorts is covered here.

Another reminder: *Before* you plunge for the Hughes "Direcpc" system, make sure you visit the actual user's newsgroup **alt.satellite.direcpc** (you need this info).

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