

## Printing on the go

*Portable printer, PDA, or WiFi: Which are right for you, and when?*

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You need a printout now, but you're at a meeting, in a hotel, or at the hospital. What do you do?

Printers have become more compact and versatile, and numerous remote printing solutions exist with more on the way. This article reviews the options to help you print anytime, anywhere.

### PORTABLE PRINTERS

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HP and Canon make inkjet printers that weigh approximately 4 lbs but are portable and compatible with most systems. These printers can be connected to your notebook via a USB or parallel port cable, or wirelessly with Bluetooth or infrared. Built with high-resolution inkjet nozzles, portable printers provide sharp printouts and can even print photos (although this can quickly drain their small ink cartridges).

By contrast, the [Pentax PocketJet](#) weighs slightly more than 1 lb. and is about the size of a three-ring hole puncher. This printer runs without ink cartridges but requires special thermal paper, so it costs about the same to operate as larger printers. The print head generates heat, which causes a reaction on the thermal paper, causing it to change from white to black. A USB or infrared is needed to connect the PocketJet to your personal digital assistant (PDA) or notebook. One disadvantage is that you can only print in black or shades of gray.

If you don't mind small (3.9" x 2.7") printouts, the [Brother MPrint](#) thermal printer is even more compact-about the size of a disk drive. This is ideal for PDA-based prescription writing programs.

### PRINTING WITH PDAS

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By installing Bluetooth or infrared onto your PDA, you can use the handheld to print. To do this, however, you will also need:

- The right software. Software titles for PDA generally are compatible with only a few printing programs, so you may need to purchase multiple programs depending on what you intend to print.

You can work around this by using the PDA to print only one or two common types of files, such as Microsoft Word files. Documents to Go and QuickOffice allow you to read and edit Word, Excel, and Power Point files on a Palm OS PDA. For printing, however, [Documents to Go](#) requires [PrintBoy](#), [IPrint](#), or [InStep Print](#) to be installed, while [QuickOffice](#) is compatible only with PrintBoy.

For Pocket PC PDAs, [PrintPocketCE](#) and PrintBoy will let you print Pocket Word documents. documents.

- The proper printer drivers. Printer Drivers are specialized files for each printer manufacturer that enable the PDA to communicate properly with the printer. Without them, the PDA cannot print because it does not know how to send the proper information.

To print from PDAs, use only printers from major manufacturers such as HP and Canon, whose printers are most commonly supported by printing software programs.

## NETWORK PRINTING

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If you use HP printers that are connected to a transmission control protocol/Internet protocol local area network (TCP/IP LAN) rather than a local computer, consider installing [HP Mobile Printing software](#) on your Windows computer or Pocket PC. This lets you print to an HP network printer without installing printer drivers, because the software creates an “HP mobile printing driver.”

After the document is sent to the software, users are prompted to enter the printer’s IP address (eg, 123.23.35.250) to begin printing. This is a great option if you’re staying in a hotel that has TCP/IP-connected printers or on a hospital network, but your computer/PDA must be connected to the network wirelessly or by LAN cable.

## PRINTING FROM A HOTEL ROOM

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Wireless fidelity (WiFi) is readily available in most major hotels (See [Psyber Psychiatry, December 2003](#)). WiFi makes printing from your hotel room relatively easy.

[PrintMe](#), a mobile and Internet printing standard, facilitates printing without having to install drivers. Documents can be printed by:

- sending an e-mail to the hotel business center printer at {printmeIDNumber}@printme.com
- or visiting the [PrintMe Web site](#) and uploading the document to the appropriate printer.

Once this is done, you will enter an assigned document ID at the printer to retrieve your print job. The charge for this service varies among providers, and you must call the hotel business center to determine the rate.

[FedEx Kinkos](#) offers a similar service but requires installation of its software. This service is only available for computers running Windows 2000 or XP and requires Microsoft .NET Framework Version 1.1 for connectivity.

Alternately, you can upload documents for printing at FedEx Kinko’s, but the company prefers that you use their proprietary [File Prep Tool](#) to create the documents. This service is compatible with Windows 95, 98, NT, 2000, ME, or XP, but is not yet available for Macintosh.

What if no WiFi? If you’re staying at a hotel without WiFi and you don’t have a portable thermal printer, try sending a fax from your computer.

First, though, your computer must have a fax modem and software that creates a “fax printer driver.” To dial out, most modems require an analog phone line. This could be a problem, since hotel telephones typically operate on digital private branch exchange (PBX) systems and require higher voltage than analog phone systems. The higher voltage can damage your modem. A digital-to-analog adapter from [Konexx](#) can resolve these issues.

## USING A BUSINESS CENTER

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If none of the above options is available, you may need to bring your file to a business center or FedEx Kinko’s. A USB flash drive is a handy file transport method (See [Psyber Psychiatry, December 2004](#)).

First, make sure the program you used to create the document is compatible with the business center’s computers. Because most business centers use the free Adobe document reader, your best bet is to convert the file to Adobe PDF, which maintains its format. Use [PDFCreator](#) or [PrimoPDF](#) to convert the file; both are free and work on Windows computers. Mac users can download the [Mac-Net Freeware PDF file creator](#).

## THE FUTURE

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Imagine a pocket-size device that prints onto a blank page as you move it across.

[PrintDreams](#) is developing such a device using its random-movement printing technology (RMPT). PrintDreams reports that the scanning device can print any document with 100% accuracy, though it seems best suited to text. The device is still a year or two from reaching the mainstream; PrintDreams is licensing its technology to other printer manufacturers.

Also, don't be surprised if cellular phones one day have the capability to print e-mail attachments using Bluetooth or general packet radio service (GPRS), a very fast data transfer protocol on a GSM network.

## Disclosure

Dr. Luo reports no financial relationship with any company whose products are mentioned in this article. The opinions expressed by Dr. Luo in this column are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of CURRENT PSYCHIATRY.