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The Motorola Sparrow

Retail's Handheld Powerhouse



THINK OF THE Motorola Sparrow as an iPhone for retailers. Equipped with a touch-sensitive back panel that keeps the screen free for viewing, the wireless prototype device integrates myriad existing technologies and features into a single palm-held powerhouse. Need to check inventory? A built-in bar-code scanner can retrieve that information. Want to see a customer's profile? The Sparrow can pull one up after detecting a loyalty card or other relevant RFID tag. Want to win brownie points with a shopper by helping her jump the checkout line? The device can process credit cards from the sales floor. This being a Motorola product, there's also a phone function, of course, just in case you need to call a supplier.

The Sparrow—so named because it's meant to be small, fast, and simple, like the bird—is a neat metaphor for the corporate mind meld that went into its production. In

2006, Motorola bought Symbol Technologies, a maker of bar-code scanners, and asked the New York-based design consultancy Aruliden to help envision what the firms' combined expertise could do for retail. Its answer was this sleek little concept. "The technology was already there," says Aruliden cofounder Rinat Aruh. "That's the beauty of this device. It's not as if we dreamed up one of those pie-in-the-sky concepts."

Shane MacGregor, director of advanced industrial design in Motorola's enterprise mobility division, says the company has been presenting the Sparrow concept to clients and gathering feedback about what they'd want in a production model. He doesn't think it will be long before Sparrows will be as ubiquitous around town as, well, sparrows. He says Motorola already has "a couple of projects in the pipeline that will be either evolutions of this or some derivative." —*Tim McKeough*