

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

THE MOSSBERG SOLUTION | Edited by Walter S. Mossberg

## A Leash on Mobile Devices That Like to Wander

BY KATHERINE BOEHRET



When I leave the house in the morning, I run through a mental checklist to be sure I'm not forgetting my phones (check), wallet (check), subway pass (check) and keys (check). But this routine falls by the wayside if I'm anywhere else at any other time of day, leaving me longing for some guarantee that I'm not forgetting anything—especially my phones.

This week, I tested two keychain gadgets that aim to help by working as wireless leashes for Bluetooth-connected phones: the \$80 **ZOMM** (zomm.com) and the \$60 **Phone Halo** (phonehalo.com). If, for example, you finish dinner in a restaurant, leave and forget your cellphone at the table, a small ZOMM device attached to your keychain would vibrate, light up and beep to let you know you walked more than 30 feet away from your phone. Likewise, the Phone Halo beeps, but its connected phone also plays "Always Something There to Remind Me," the '80s tune by Naked Eyes, if one device is far enough away from the other (you set the range between five and 35 feet).

I preferred using the ZOMM because it works with any Bluetooth-enabled phone, while Phone Halo corresponds with software that

currently only installs on BlackBerry and Android devices. (A representative for Phone Halo says it will work with the next iPhone software release planned for this summer.) The ZOMM also doubles as a speakerphone, so that when the phone rings, you can answer it using the ZOMM on your keychain rather than digging through your bag to find the phone. People who already pre-ordered ZOMMs will receive them in early May; everyone else will be able to buy them in early June. Phone Halo can be purchased through its Web site.

If you're one of those people who doesn't always keep your keys and cellphone in the same place throughout the day, you may grow tired of this alarm. Simply turning off the ZOMM or Phone Halo solves the problem, but you would have to remember to turn them back on before leaving a location.

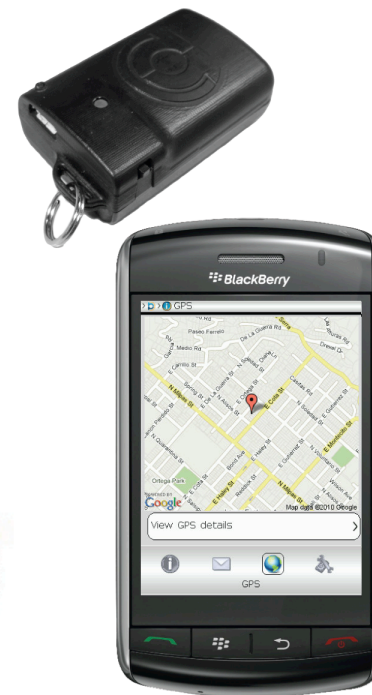
Phone forgetfulness has spawned its own industry, as is evidenced by the hundreds of applications made specifically for locating and remotely clearing lost devices that run on BlackBerry, iPhone, Android, Palm and Microsoft's Windows Phone operating systems. Phone companies like Verizon, Sprint and AT&T sell family locator programs that can alert a system when one person's GPS-enabled phone is in a certain location, and this could also be used to generally locate a phone.

One of the features included with Apple's \$99-a-year MobileMe service is Find My Phone, which locates the iPhone on a map, sends a message to it or plays an audio alert on the device; this feature has been extended to the iPad.

The ZOMM, which stands for "Zachry, Olivia and Madison's Mom," looks like a keychain-size discus. The device was created by a mom, Laurie Penix, to solve common cellphone problems: Besides being a wireless leash to a phone, it's a speakerphone so the phone can be answered without digging through a bag and it's a panic button that calls local emergency services and tells help to come to the phone's location via an automatic message.

I had good luck using the ZOMM as a speakerphone. Once this device was connected via Bluetooth to my cellphone, I answered incoming calls by pressing once on the ZOMM's center button. Built-in noise-cancellation technology tricked my friends into not knowing I was using speakerphone for calls, including one person who loathes when people answer his calls using speakerphone. While chatting through the ZOMM's speakerphone, I tapped again on the device's center button and sent the call to my cellphone to continue the conversation. A double tap on the center button will ignore an incoming call. I tested holding down the device's center button for a long time,

The \$80 ZOMM (below left) and \$60 Phone Halo (right) alert you if you're leaving a phone behind.



which set off the a loud panic alarm. The company advises not doing this unless there's a real emergency, but the alarm wasn't as loud as I expected. A ZOMM representative says the device sold in June will have a volume measuring four decibels louder. According to the company, its rechargeable battery lasts over three days on standby and over two hours of straight talk time. The Phone Halo is a small, black rectangular gadget that also hangs on a keychain, but the company suggests attaching it to

other things you don't want to lose, like a digital camera or even a kid's backpack. Unlike the ZOMM, the Phone Halo lacks a speakerphone. Its free, corresponding app isn't yet available in the BlackBerry App World or Android Market stores, so users must follow in-box instructions to download it from a URL using a mobile browser. I did this without trouble, but the process isn't as simple as it should be and could intimidate some people.

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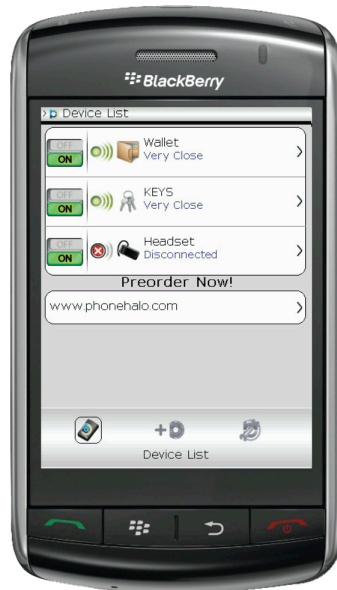
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Settings within the Phone Halo software allow for a phone to be locked as soon as it's out of range, and will record the GPS coordinates of the lost item from the place it was last connected to Phone Halo. The phone's alert can be changed from "Always Something There to Remind Me," though I thought this song was clever enough to want to keep. Its rechargeable battery is estimated to last about one week, but this varies depending on how often Phone Halo is used.

The Phone Halo was developed on the belief that if you lost your phone, you'd want your friends and social-network contacts to know so they could help you find it. The app let me select people from my BlackBerry Contacts to determine who would be contacted via email should I lose my phone, and I also opted to allow the device to notify my Twitter followers if my BlackBerry was lost. This was useful when I left a cellphone at a party and didn't know it; a friend saw the tweet and found the phone. In reality, the buzzing wireless leash alert—along with the email and tweet notifications—went off more than desired whenever I moved the phone away from the Phone Halo or if my phone's Bluetooth turned off. Tweets and emails included specific details including the exact date and time my phone was "misplaced."

If you don't want to lose your phone in the first place, consider a wireless leash like the ZOMM for its multifunctionality. If all else fails and you really need to find your phone, this additional ultra high-tech method usually works: Grab someone else's phone and call it.

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Phone Halo "Home Screen" on the BlackBerry.

 phone halo  
[phonehalo.com](http://phonehalo.com)