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SMARTPHONES & PDAs

It's not all about the calls.

Not too long ago, people thought the convenience of a portable phone was all about the calls, but these days, cellular technology has morphed into a whole new concept, with as much processing power as the computers you used 10 years ago.

Whether you're content with a basic cell phone or lust after the hottest new smartphone, today's advances in technology allow you to get anything you could possibly want or imagine... for a price. Read on for up-to-date info on the latest smartphones and personal digital assistants (PDAs) and the pros and cons of what they offer.

BASIC PDAs

Before cell phones, business professionals were content to carry their data around in these handheld gadgets. There are still good PDA devices on the market, especially from HP and Palm. Most include the basic calendar, calculator, phone directory, document storage and to-do list. Many also interface with streamlined versions of business applications, including Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. But since PDAs lack a phone feature, they've recently taken a backseat to the growing market of smartphones. If a PDA fits your needs and your budget, you'll be working smarter wherever you are.

TRY THESE

• **Palm T|X (estimated retail \$299) or Palm Tungsten E2 (estimated retail \$199)**

Loyalists still use Palms as a personal organizer for their simplicity, speed and low price point. Since a stand-alone PDA doesn't cost anything beyond the original purchase price (meaning no cell phone service package like you'll find with a smartphone), it's basically a mini-laptop that enables you to work from anywhere. The Palm T|X does have Wi-Fi and e-mail access; however, you'll still need a basic cell phone to make calls.

• **HP iPAQ 110 Classic Handheld (estimated retail \$299)**

With integrated Wi-Fi, you can access e-mail and the web when you're in a free Wi-Fi hot spot, avoiding the high monthly fee for a wireless service package. Again, you'll still need a cell phone, but this is truly an office-on-the-go, with a full suite of Microsoft applications running on Windows Mobile 6 software.

SMARTPHONES

Technology changes fast, as does what's in fashion. Phone manufacturers have moved beyond the basic cell phone and/or PDA to create smartphones that are as popular for glam and status as for function.

These super-powered cell phones offer multi-function features, often including a digital camera, as well as wireless access to e-mail

and the web. These three-ounce devices can handle voice communication, text and picture messaging, as well as being capable to download and play music (MP3) and video. As long as manufacturers keep packing new features into small devices, people will come up with equally clever ideas for their uses.

Most smartphones run on 3G, a third-generation cellular service that allows service providers to bundle broadband services, including network access, data transfer and real-time communication for medical and emergency teams. That's why global positioning systems (GPS), which provide turn-by-turn maps and navigation, are now common in these phones, as well as in separate dashboard devices. You'll see a lot of similarity among the big players in today's smartphones. Here are three brand-new models worth your attention:

TRY THESE

• **Apple iPhone 3G (exclusively for AT&T)**
WHAT IT COSTS: Estimated retail \$199 (8GB) or \$299 (16GB) with two-year AT&T service contract

Apple's development of the original iPhone in 2007 paved the way for a new generation of smartphones. In 2008, Apple introduced the iPhone 3G with faster data speed and assisted GPS, leading other manufacturers to create devices with similar features, including:

- Color LCD or touch-screen
- Application viewer for Word and Excel
- MP3 media player
- Adequate battery life
- Wireless access
- Internal memory and secure digital (SD) card access for storing and transferring data, music and photos

For all the praise heaped on the iPhone, don't let the cool factor push you beyond your budget. The iPhone is still undergoing developmental changes and needs to gain stability to earn your trust as an all-in-one communication tool.

• **BlackBerry Bold (exclusively for AT&T)**
WHAT IT COSTS: Estimated retail \$299 with two-year AT&T service contract and mail-in rebate

BlackBerry smartphones from Canadian firm Research In Motion still rate high with consumers, both for personal and business use. There's good reason why more than 10 million subscribers use a BlackBerry smartphone. BlackBerry gets high marks for paying attention to the device's phone features, including seamless voice dialing, caller ID, call forwarding and conference calling. Unique in these devices is a push-to-talk service that connects up to 21 people on a call in seconds (requires an additional fee to activate). The units' stunning displays create ease for e-mailing, opening and reading documents and browsing the web.

BlackBerry has also teamed up with Bluetooth for hands-free calls. Plus, you can multitask, receiving or sending text messages and writing memos while on a call. Users can also integrate and synchronize multiple e-mail accounts on this and other BlackBerry devices.

• T-Mobile G1 with Google

WHAT IT COSTS: Estimated retail \$180 with T-Mobile service contract and instant discount Since most manufacturers can't keep up with consumer demand, many have begun partnering with wireless/cellular carriers to share the costs and speed up development. The T-Mobile G1 with Google was born in late 2008, on the heels of Apple's iPhone success. This partnership allowed a rapidly growing software company like Google to jump into the telecom and hardware business, leaving the technical aspects of the service to T-Mobile.

The T-Mobile G1, built on Google's Android operating system, offers a touch-screen interface, a pull-out QWERTY keyboard, Wi-Fi, 3G, GPS and a music player. Industry hopes are that third-party companies will build applications that users can download directly to the phone, allowing it to morph into whatever a user wants it to be.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WIRELESS ACCESS

Cell phones have at least two kinds of connectivity. Through cellular tower service, your phone calls and text messages use short messaging system (SMS), but for e-mail and web browsing, the phone also needs a multimedia service package that can make your service plan more expensive. Most smartphones have built-in Bluetooth connectivity for short-range transmission, including wireless headsets.

The appeal of having all your data with you, an updated calendar and Wi-Fi access for e-mail and web browsing is making these lightweight pocket gadgets a must-have for business and personal use. Because there's room in the market for everything from bulky do-alls to Chiclets-sized keyboards on the tiniest BlackBerry, be sure to try out your choice in a store. Frustrations like poor backlight, low battery life or a difficult keyboard means the magic can fade long before your warranty.

As manufacturers partner with service providers, you may find the phone you want won't work with the cellular service in your area. However, since these phones are such a common commodity, the good news is if you buy one you don't like, you can usually return or exchange it for one that fits your style.

COST

Choose a PDA or smartphone that doesn't make you pay extra for features you don't

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