



Genius Phones

The iPhone and its ilk are brilliant at transforming from a cell into a TV, PC *and* stereo BY KATE ASHFORD

These days, the term “cell phone” is pretty much synonymous with “lifeline.” It’s your link to your kids, your spouse and (perhaps unfortunately) your boss. Until recently, however, the cell wasn’t much more than a vehicle for receiving and making calls. Sure, you’d figured out how to text and take pictures. *Maybe* you could e-mail. But you were lucky if you could load a website. And watch TV? Play music? Yeah, right.

The latest “multimedia phones”—in other words, the iPhone and its look-alike

followers—have changed all that. These devices offer the ability to easily use e-mail, browse the Web, download and listen to music, and play video, all with the touch of a finger or stylus. “In the past, smart phones were expensive devices targeting productivity, and we still have that class of device,” says Avi Greengart, a wireless analyst with tech research firm Current Analysis. “But we’re starting to see a separate class that’s more expensive and more capable but is less aimed at getting work done, more aimed at enjoyment.”

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

It was a close call, but the Sprint Touch came out the winner for its:

- › **Easy access to e-mail**—multiple accounts—and the Web
- › **Ability to view streaming video** and download **songs**
- › **User-friendly design** that rivals the iPhone’s

Call it mobile fun. And call it the future: By 2011, nine out of 10 phones are expected to have basic multimedia capabilities.

The big question is, Which one to get? Since Apple dropped the price on its iPhone, these mobiles are in the same price range after discounts: \$250 to \$400. And data packages, which allow you to upload and download files, browse and e-mail, commonly start at \$10 to \$20 a month on

top of your phone-plan cost. (Exception: The iPhone's basic service plan includes data, though the total bill is comparable to its competitors'.) With costs pretty much equal, we tested features—the functionality of Web, e-mail, audio, video and phone, all the while keeping in mind ease of use. It was a close call between Sprint's Touch and the iPhone, but the former pulled it off for its ability to download audio and video on the spot and its easy battery replacement. (Once the iPhone's battery dies, you're phoneless, forced to ship your cell to Apple for a new battery, which costs \$86.)

All this said, you may not have the luxury of picking phone first, carrier second. So if you're renewing a contract and choosing among *other* multimedia cells—in a few months there will be even more on the market—consider these questions: **Will it work with my computer or other devices?** Music downloaded on iTunes can't be uploaded to anything other than the iPhone. And songs downloaded from other cell phones aren't directly compatible with iTunes or an iPod. Most phones are PC-friendly, but if you've got a Mac, some syncing programs, such as Verizon's VCast, won't work with your machine. **Is it easy for me to use?** The keyboard vs. touchpad vs. stylus debate comes down to personal preference. To determine how comfortable you are with each, check out how quickly you can get to your contacts and how easily you can type in a number.

What features are most appealing to me? Want to watch live TV? You need a phone that provides streaming or broadcast video (some play only clips, which are downloaded). If you want your cell to become your primary MP3 player, you might want one that allows you to download directly. You may also want an additional memory card because while the iPhone can hold 1,000 songs, the others don't come close. And if you use your music player less often than you do your taxes, well...you're best off waiting till your plan comes up for renewal, by which point maybe they'll be throwing in one of these phones for free. \$

How we did it Our tester used each phone for a week, checking e-mail, browsing the Web, watching TV and listening to music. Oh, yeah, she made calls too.

Brand	Messaging and Web	Music and Video	Ease of Use	Bottom Line
Sprint Touch by HTC \$250 (with discounts) 	Handled two e-mail accounts. The browser displayed full pages , viewable in portrait or landscape, with finger scrolling.	Offers Sprint TV as part of data package , with streaming news and shows like <i>Grey's Anatomy</i> . Picture fills the screen. Music is downloadable directly from Sprint's network for 99¢ a song.	> Keyboard? No > Stylus? Yes The programs aren't all on one home screen, but the interface is user-friendly and you don't need the stylus to access many of the features.	Even though the downloadable music isn't iPod-friendly, the big touchscreen, solid multimedia capability and great basics make this phone our top pick.
AT&T Apple iPhone \$400 (no discounts) 	Great e-mail interface, offering previews of messages and handling two accounts well. Best Web browsing , with full views of Web pages, portrait or landscape, and quick zoom-in and scrolling.	YouTube and iTunes are the only video options , and unless you're connected to a Wi-Fi network, you have to transfer music directly from your computer via iTunes.	> Keyboard? No > Stylus? No The phone is slick but lacks some basic functionality, like voice dialing or suggesting contacts as you dial. To replace battery, you must ship phone to Apple and pay \$86.	Solid design and extremely fun , but with no direct music or video download (without Wi-Fi), it's lacking. The nonreplaceable battery also kept this out of the top spot.
Verizon Voyager by LG \$300 (with discounts) 	Can't access e-mail from the outer touchscreen or the program menu. The Web browser runs only in landscape mode, but pages are fully viewable and offer finger scrolling.	Offers VCast Mobile TV—broadcast—with a \$15 video plan, which boasts a good picture and even a tiny channel guide . You can download music from VCast directly to the phone for \$1.99 a song—and a copy is sent to your PC.	> Keyboard? Yes (clamshell) > Stylus? No The QWERTY keyboard is a little wide, but it's a nice option if you tire of touchscreen typing, and there are separate number keys, which is a perk.	A great phone with some fancy features, but the e-mail feels like an afterthought .
AT&T Tilt \$300 (with discounts) 	Handled two e-mail accounts easily, but creating new text required moving through two menus , and Web browsing felt pretty unimpressive, comparatively.	Offers clips and streaming video—but the picture only uses about half of the screen. You can't download music directly, but the Tilt offers access to XM Radio . And you can transfer songs from your PC.	> Keyboard? Yes (slide-out) > Stylus? Yes The number keys are a different color, making them easy to find. Screen tilts for laptop-like reading but this makes it hard to hit the command keys.	Packs in e-mail, music play and video, but for the same price you could get a phone with more offerings .
T-Mobile Wing \$300 (with discounts) 	Same basic interface as the Tilt, with the same drawbacks, and Web browsing was a bit slow .	Video and music must be transferred directly from your computer.	> Keyboard? Yes (slide-out) > Stylus? Yes Some navigation requires both typing and the stylus, since the only way to go back is to hit an X in the upper right-hand corner.	Some good features, but behind the pack when it comes to true multimedia capability .