

# Cell phones turning into handheld computers



John Deans

Since the summer of 2007 I have been an ecstatic owner of the Apple iPhone. Now that I am on the third revision of the awesome communications device, it has just gotten better, faster, and smarter with over 125,000 applications available for it on iTunes App Store.

Just after the first month of my initial iPhone tests I proclaimed to numerous clients that within a couple of years most cellular

phones will be like the iPhone with dynamic touch screen GUIs (Graphic Users Interfaces). Sure enough, numerous look-alikes, want-to-be's and next generation touch screen phones have entered the marketplace.

Being a rabid capitalist, I say the more the merrier since competition breeds quality, better availability, accelerated innovation, and lower prices. Now that the iPhone has been selling well for two and a half years, some stiff competition has entered the arena with the BlackBerry Storm, Motorola Droid and the long-awaited Google Nexus phone.

Since I have performed dozens of migrations from BlackBerry to iPhones for my clients over the years, I have ignored the touch screen Storm, but cannot help but be intrigued by the new Droid and Nexus.

Cellular phones are massively more complex, capable, and communicative than their predecessors 20 years ago. I was pumped back in 1991 just to be able to talk while driving when I first started consulting in Houston. Our phones have gotten smarter but the government nannies have become more obtrusive making laws against

driving and talking since they make policy on the lowest common denominator of personal responsibility and capabilities.

Today's smartphones like the iPhone, Droid, Nexus, and others are multi-function computers that perform voice, Web, e-mail, texting, GPS and literally thousands of other tasks based on applications that are constantly being developed for those platforms. I hardly use my laptop during the day since my network troubleshooting tools are now based on my iPhone.

For those of you looking for the best smartphone, any of these three devices should fit your needs and desires. I'll do my best to bridle my iPhone favoritism during this review of the iPhone, Droid and Nexus, but don't hold me to it.

Physically all three have roughly the same footprint size of around 115-mm high by 60-mm wide, weigh from 130 g to 169g and of course have color LED touch screens.

The size of the touch screen vary a bit with both the Droid and Nexus coming in a tad bigger with a 3.7-inch diagonal screen compared to the slightly smaller 3.5-inch iPhone display.

Since all three devices are multi-media capable, internal storage is ample with all of them available in 32 GB versions. Each jump up in 8 GB and 16

GB increments ups the price of course, but if you are into having thousands of songs, pictures, movies, podcasts and audio books internally stored then any of these three should be able to hold all your digital stuff.

Lately I have been downloading YouTube videos onto my iPhone for instant playback to make my point during heated political debates on the two hot topics of healthcare reform and climate change legislation — more on this next week.

All three have GPS functionality providing driving directions, WiFi networking for local wireless communications, and voice commands to help in hands-free environments mandated by our glorious legislators. Though all three can take full motion video, their cameras do differ a bit with the Droid and Nexus equipped with 5 megapixel optics compared to the iPhone with just a 3 megapixel camera.

Droid and Nexus also beat up on the iPhone due to their true multi-tasking abilities which is still not there for the iPhone. Apple's next big goal for this summer's version of the fourth generation iPhone really needs to address this shortfall. Steven

Jobs of Apple may move slow on the multi-tasking iPhone but when it does finally come out it will be smokin!

Though all three have accelerometers which enable display rotation and directional sensing, the iPhone and Nexus have digital compasses while Droid left that feature out. Between a GPS and a built-in digital compass, you should never get lost with smartphones like the iPhone and Nexus.

One area where the iPhone shines is the vast assortment of apps from iTunes compared to just a fraction available for the Droid and Nexus from Android Market. Basically, the iPhone has three times the number of apps than Droid and Nexus due to Apple's two year head start.

Battery life on these phones can be a critical issue, and since iPhone's have been notoriously deficient in this area I am sensitive to this subject. I have to keep an emergency re-charge battery with me in the car along with a lighter A/C adapter to help my iPhone 3GS make it through the day sometimes. This is even after I have implemented power saving efforts like disabling 3G, Bluetooth and even WiFi.

With Droid's talk time touted

at 6.4 hours and Nexus being able to keep working up to seven hours, they both take lead over the iPhone's five-hour talk time which I have never been able to attain. Hopefully this summer Apple will deliver both true multi-tasking and better battery life so I can keep bragging about the iPhone in general.

The cost for these beauties are pretty close to each other with the Droid and iPhone setting you back at least \$199 and the Nexus somewhat cheaper at \$179. These phones are tied to specific cellular providers which is something I hope changes in the next year or two. Wouldn't it be great to have any phone work on any cellular network? Now that would be a free market!

Bottom line: Whether your pick the iPhone, choose the Droid or grasp for the Nexus, the days of just talking on a cell phone are over because true handheld computing is here to stay.

Next week's column: Politics of Google.

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