

# Apple iPhone Review

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In January of 2007, Steve Jobs graced the stage and informed the world of Apple's proudest creation, the iPhone. Ever since then, the media as well as the those of us who blog and podcast, have been analyzing every little detail about this phone. We were given "inside information" that the iPhone would have terrible battery life (40 minutes to be exact) and would also be very unstable.

That was only the beginning of the hype.

The iPhone arrived on June 29th to thousands of first adopters, tech enthusiasts, and gadget freaks (that would be me). Hundreds of people camped overnight in front of Apple and AT&T stores to ensure they would have one on the day it was released. But would it be worth it?

On every tech news outlet, iPhone stories were numerous and dominated the "internet" waves

for the entire week of June 29th. Many of my tech colleagues were sickened by this enthusiasm and dubbed it "overblown hype". Truth? Maybe. Once the iPhone hit the streets, the tech news surrounding it nearly doubled. There were literally thousands of reviews and first impressions on the web in record time. The social photography web site flickr.com had thousands of photos tagged "iphone". Technical blogs and podcasts seemingly talked only about the iPhone, it's ins and outs, it's shortcomings, and it's surprises. So why am I writing this article now? Well, it's been over a week, and the "honeymoon period" is over. I've had some time to use this device in my everyday life and I will now share with you my experiences.

## First Impressions

When I first opened the box of the iPhone, the first thing to jump out at me was the screen. Having owned a Playstation Portable (PSP), I had previous experiences with a gorgeous screen for playing games and watching movies. The iPhone screen is no different. As you'll see in my unboxing video, the first word to come out of my mouth was "wow" when I turned it on. That was not scripted.



Although other iPhone owners had issues activating with AT&T, my experience was the best possible scenario. I plugged the iPhone in, told iTunes I was an existing customer, chose my plan, and was activated in less than 10 minutes. Certainly, not everyone had this kind of experience, but I can say, that other providers need to take a close look at online activation as a possible solution. It was extremely convenient to do all of this on my own without some sales representative clouding my judgment inside an AT&T store. After activation, the first thing I did was try out the camera since it got the least amount of coverage prior to launch. My previous experience with camera phones set the bar pretty low in terms of expectations, but I found the picture taking "experience" to be a nice thing on the iPhone. The picture quality was typical camera phone garbage. I then tried the other applications and configured Wifi. The entire experience was typical Apple: easy, effective and efficient. It is safe to say that my first impressions on this device were better than anticipated.

## What it does well

As I continued to use the iPhone, I noticed little things the iPhone excels at. The first, is speed. The iPhone UI speed is amazingly fast. Some experts speculated the iPhone commercials and tutorials were scripted and there was no way the UI could be the fast in practice. Let me set the record straight. The iPhone performs and behaves exactly the way it was portrayed in January's keynote, the advertisements on TV, and the tutorials on Apple's web site. Other cell phones I've used such as the Sony Ericsson S610a, Nokia E61 and Blackberry Pearl all have had sluggish interfaces. I was extremely happy to see the iPhone perform functions as fast as it did.

The next is integration. Each of the iPhone applications integrate with one another extremely well. For example, links to Youtube videos automatically launch the Youtube application. Google Maps links automatically open that application. iTunes fades songs in and out when receiving a phone call. These are just some examples that make the iPhone experience seamless.

The phone part of the iPhone didn't get a lot of exposure, but it is definitely one of my favorite features. The "favorites" serves as a replacement for traditional speed dial and the contacts integration with multi-touch is actual rather functional. After a short learning curve, I am making calls faster than I did on my Blackberry pearl and my Nokia E61. Once the calls have been made, the iPhone presents a brilliant interface to add callers, switch to bluetooth headset, put the call on hold, etc. These common options aren't buried in some obscure menu, but are present right on the screen during the call. I really love it.



The hard buttons on the iPhone are perfect. Each is placed in the ideal position and is easily accessible. The volume button and the mute button is placed right next to each other so a wacky brain like mine can understand the relationship. Also, the standby button is getting a lot of usage before I put the phone down or in my pocket. Making the home button a hard button was a smart decision. It gets a lot of use and its concave shape makes it easy to find when you're operating with one hand.

Battery life is better than I thought it would be. For a device that does so much over Wifi, bluetooth and plays music and videos, I'm certainly surprised I can get a full day's use out of it. Having being used to charging my Blackberry Pearl daily while doing half of these tasks, I can see that I'm very happy.

Safari on the iPhone is a breath of fresh air. Although the browser on my Nokia E61 is similar to Safari in many ways, the multi-touch zoom and pan features of Safari put it over the top. I find web surfing on the iPhone to be a departure of my previous cell phones. I have used plenty of Windows mobile devices as well, and Safari makes them all look ancient and dated. My most visited websites, Google Reader, Twitter, Jaiku, and Flickr all worked well on the iPhone. I did not miss Java and Flash at all.



The iPod feels like a next generation iPod. It's not your ordinary iPod with video tacked on, this actually feels new. Flipping through songs using Coverflow just feels right. It's the only way I know how to explain it. It almost reminded me of when vinyl was popular and you'd flip through your album collection, pick an album, play a song on it, and then flip the vinyl cover over to see the song list. Very functional. The speakerphone is a pleasant surprise in terms of combining it with the iPod. If you're sitting in your hotel room, and want to hear some earbud-less tunes while working, you can do so without buying an external speaker system for the iPod (like I did). The speakerphone is loud enough to work in most reasonably quiet environments, but sound gets distorted at maximum volume.

Google Maps is surprisingly fun on the iPhone. Again, the multi-touch pan and zoom features makes this a pleasant experience. I went to the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty and the Empire state building in a few taps. Switching the view to satellite puts it over the top and makes it a killer app instantly.

I can go on and on about every single application on the iPhone and how they work well. Just about everything the iPhone does, it does well. Now let's talk about what it doesn't do so well.

### **What it doesn't do well**

The iPhone is not perfect. One of the things it doesn't do well, is utilize its features to the fullest. The first of its shortcomings is bluetooth. On my previous smart phones (and regular phones), I utilized bluetooth to not only serve as hands free headset protocol, but also transfer files and synchronize with my Mac. Oddly enough, the iPhone doesn't do any of this over bluetooth and we are stuck with synchronization via wires. Also, we are stuck with no file storage. That stinks since I have 8GB at my disposal.

On the same note, one cannot add ring tones to the iPhone. This basic feature of just about every cell phone on the market strikes me as surprising that it's missing. The fact that it's not there at launch brings up serious questions as to what's going on at Apple. Speculation continues on "what's coming" but I'm not talking about what's coming, I'm talking about what's not there now.

The iPhone struggles to serve as a true organizer. The iCal application includes no todo list functionality. This is a basic function of other PDAs and smart phones today and it shouldn't be missing. I understand that one can use web applications such as [tadalist.com](http://tadalist.com) to do this, but you lose synchronization with your workstation! It's



frustrating to have decent contact and calendar management, and no todo lists. On that note, you can't synchronize Notes from the Notes application to your computer. This is functionality that even the iPod can perform and the iPhone can't. Unacceptable.

The iPhone also lacks customization. Aside from ring tones, you can't customize the application standby screen. You are stuck with plain black. The only thing you can customize is the wallpaper which is only present when the phone is locked or making a call! Why include customization on screens that you'll barely see. It's a minor annoyance, but it's a standard feature on many smart phones.

The iPhone UI, while beautiful and intuitive, is inconsistent. Some applications such as Safari and iTunes allow you to rotate the device and switch to landscape mode. This mode is one of my favorite with the iPhone since the keyboard is easier to use the long strings of text are easier to read. Unfortunately, they left this out of the Mail application. Why?! It would fit in so well with Mail, it isn't funny. The iPhone should be consistent with this functionality across all applications or don't implement it at all. I find myself wanting to flip the phone in certain instances and I can't. The tilt to landscape mode is such a brilliant feature that's under utilized.

The iPhone keyboard needs work. I got used to it quickly since it is a similar form factor as the Blackberry Pearl, but it needs to "learn" more. Suretype on the Blackberry Pearl learned new terminology the more I used it, while the iPhone is stubborn and continues to provide the same suggestions for terms that I've already corrected many times. This seems like a minor annoyance, but over time, it can drive you insane. By the way, I can thumb type very well on it.

The iPhone needs copy and paste. It needs it. If someone emails you their updated address, how can you update your contacts info from the iPhone? You have to manually type it all in. This basic feature should be there and its not. Not a deal breaker but still a growing annoyance as time progresses.

The iPhone needs applications. The included applications are brilliant and work well for the most part, but Apple needs to embrace the developer community and create a real SDK. This is one of my biggest gripes at the moment because it could literally put the iPhone in the “unstoppable” category. The iPhone needs more applications and it needs them badly.

### **Overall impressions**

Overall, I'd say my expectations were exceeded with the iPhone. Even with the insane amount of hype it received and its glaring shortcomings, I'm happy with the purchase and I plan to keep it. Even if Apple is late with its updates (I hope not, I've been burned by Palm with this), I'll be content for a long time with this device. It's kind of embarrassing to say that “making calls” is actually easier on this thing, but it's true. Apple did their homework on a lot of the UI aspects. It's snappy, it's functional, and does what Apple says it does.

I'm not going to get into price calculations since it's been overdone at this point. If you feel the iPhone isn't worth \$600 for the functionality it gives, then by all means don't buy it. I think it's worth every penny I paid for it not only for the devices it has replaced, but for the user experience I have with it. It literally has changed the way I look at cell phones.

### **Conclusion**

The iPhone had a fierce launch buildup of over 6 months and created an internet buzz like none other. It set expectations in the stratosphere and literally had to be near perfect to not disappoint. That's exactly what it has done. It's not perfect, but it's positives outweigh its weaknesses by a substantial amount. Look out Nokia, Motorola, Samsung, and LG: Apple has arrived.

**Rating: 8.5/10**