

iWant to change MY PHONE

Feel the need to get an iPhone cos everyone and their mum has one? Well, it's not the only option available. Cheryl Zhang rounds up the best smartphones in the market and puts them to the test.

Just 10 years ago, phones were an item of want. If you owned a giant black brick with a yellow backlit screen and extendable antenna, you'd be the object of public envy. Boy, how times, tastes and technology have changed.

These days, it seems no one can survive without their mobile phone. These pocket-sized gadgets aren't just for making and receiving calls anymore. Whether you want to get directions to a certain location, read and follow up on emails, listen to

music while waiting for your friends to arrive, or even take, edit and upload photos onto social networking websites — in real time — these smartphones have all the bases covered. But are their performances all up to par? We put them to the test.



"Four phones? All the better to call my friends with!"

What is a smartphone?

With technology advancing and getting smarter by the day, there's no specific definition for a converged mobile device, otherwise known as a smartphone. Is it one that gets you from point to point? Or is it one that helps you deal with work on the go?

Wayne Tang, Product Manager of HTC Southeast Asia, defines a smartphone as a device that helps you in your daily activities. "As long as it's smart enough to help you out in terms of productivity, daily scheduling, and keeping you connected be it via email, the Internet or social networking websites, it's a smartphone."

Howard Lo, owner of Standing Sushi Bar and avid phonephile, is currently using a HTC HD2. He defines a smartphone as "a device that simplifies the management of your life. It's a planner, communicator, camera and entertainment device rolled into one. Mine is like my personal secretary — I use it to handle emails across multiple accounts; synchronise my calendar, contacts, tasks and notes across computers; and do fun things like play games and go on Twitter."

Here are some points that can help you decide if you're using a smartphone.

- It usually runs on an operating system that can support advanced functions. Current operating systems in the market include the Android, the Symbian OS, Apple OS and Windows Mobile.
- It has advanced features like photo editing and word processing programmes, electronic diaries, and even weather and traffic reports.
- It provides easy access to information, be it via existing programmes or the Internet.
- It keeps you connected — you can access your email, various networking sites and instant messaging services.
- It has support applications (apps) that can be downloaded from open sources and customised to suit your needs.
- It comes with a sizable inbuilt memory and supports expandable memory space to store the apps and programmes you might install.

In short, a smartphone is a mini-computer that allows you to make and receive calls!



No, I'm not a camwhore. Really.



"Press this button and a surprise will pop out!"

HTC HD2

The world's first Windows phone with touch technology houses a plethora of features within a glossy exterior. No wonder it's currently the main jewel in HTC's crown.

THE MUSCLE TEST: Its generous 4.3-inch pixel-packed glossy display is the largest in the market at the moment, and it's a treat for the eyes. HTC Sense allows you to customise your display screen in many ways, such as displaying the weather as your wallpaper. But what I love best about the HD2 is how it acts as your personal wireless access point and modem. I can even start up my laptop and access the Internet using the HD2 as my modem. The phone comes packed with Office Mobile, Windows Live, Outlook and Adobe PDF Reader LE, so I can always work on the go.

THE SMS/WALK TEST: Because of the wide screen size, I need to use both hands to handle the phone. It vibrates in acknowledgment when I tap a button, but I still have to glance down occasionally to make sure the auto word completion function doesn't key in the wrong word. Unfortunately, there's no option of an alpha-numeric keypad, so I really have to slow down when typing and walking.

THE CAMWHORE TEST: Lighting is key to good photos, so I'm glad to find that the HD2 has a 5-megapixel autofocus camera with dual LED flash. It also responds really

quickly so I can capture every priceless moment. Sadly, self-portraits are a hassle, as the shutter can only be activated by tapping on the screen. What a waste of an awesome camera.

THE DIRECTION-IDIOT TEST: The HD2 is loaded with Google Maps, an internal GPS antenna and a digital compass, so navigation is easy and free, even when I'm overseas. All I have to do is remain in clear view of the sky for the phone to connect with the satellite. When driving, the lack of voice navigation means I've to constantly keep my eye on the phone. There's also a slight lag time — it doesn't quite reflect your current position as quickly as it should. If you want to have 3D turn-by-turn navigation, you can try browsing the Android Marketplace for third party apps.

HTC HD2 RETAILS AT \$918 WITHOUT OPERATOR PLAN.



VERDICT: I love the HD2, but it can be slightly hefty compared to the other smartphones. But that won't be a problem for long — the brand will be launching the HD2 Mini, which has the exact same features as the HD2 but with a 3.2-inch screen. It's a great alternative with a slightly more affordable price tag, so look out for it.

Nokia N97

Resembling a mini-computer, the N97 is one of the most powerful phones in Nokia's stable. Two years after its launch, it's still holding its own in the market.

THE MUSCLE TEST: It comes with an internal 32GB storage that can be expanded to a whopping 48GB. Since it has a 3.5-mm headphone jack, I happily load in my music. But although its 640 x 350 pixel screen can show off 16.7 million colours, its performance is hampered by the lag time and resistant display screen (I have to place more pressure when tapping on it). The 150g phone can only display eight widgets on the home screen at once, and still uses the traditional grid as its main menu. For someone used to flick-and-scroll interfaces,

its four-directional menu navigation button is a technological step backwards. I'm also disappointed by the Nokia Ovi Store. With its current count of over 5,500 apps and content, it's only about 25 percent of its competitors' count of over 20,000.

THE SMS/WALK TEST: Now I remember why I resisted switching to a full touchscreen phone for the longest time. SMSing on the N97 is a breeze, whether I'm using the well-spaced slide-out QWERTY keyboard or the alpha-numeric T9

keyboard on the touchscreen — the buttons are oversized and the phone vibrates to acknowledge that a button has been tapped. Say hello to SMSing under the table during meetings again!

THE CAMWHORE TEST: The main lens is a 5-megapixel Carl Zeiss lens with autofocus, LED flash, video light and glotagging. It's protected and activated by a sliding cover, which easily opens when other items in my bag brush against it. Photos can be taken either by tapping on an icon on the screen or pressing a button at the side of the phone. It also comes with options like colour tone and exposure settings so you can indulge your inner camwhore.

THE DIRECTION-IDIOT TEST: With Nokia Ovi Maps, integrated GPS, a compass and an accelerometer, searching and navigation are idiotproof. However, this is hampered by the laggy visuals of the screen. In addition, if you want turn-by-turn voice-guided directions, you'll have to pay to upgrade the application.

VERDICT: The N97 was worth the money when it first launched, seeing as it was so far ahead of its competitors. However, with the current plethora of phones featuring much smoother interfaces and app markets with more choices, I'd hesitate forking out such a large sum of money for it.

NOKIA N97 RETAILS AT \$988 WITHOUT OPERATOR PLAN AND GST.





Apple iPhone 3GS

Ahh, the phone many predict will take over the world. But are its functions really on par with its popularity?

THE MUSCLE TEST: Perhaps the biggest selling point of the iPhone is the large number of apps available on the iTunes store, with everything from bus arrival guides to currency converters. I'm only limited by the memory space, which is either 8, 16 or 32GB. Of course, I'm not discounting the customisable, user-friendly interface. Although I can listen to music, make calls, and record voice memos on the same device, the battery life is very short. And because the battery can't be removed, you don't have the option of having an extra battery on standby.

THE SMS/WALK TEST: Whether it's typing while walking or single-handedly, both are hard to do on the iPhone. I was even overtaken by an elderly lady when I slowed down to type an SMS. However, it's one of the few smartphones that can support numerous international languages without a tedious updating process.

THE CAMWHORE TEST: It's impossible to take a portrait of myself without looking constipated or having to use a mirror. Fellow camwhores will not be impressed with the meagre 3-megapixel camera, which doesn't have zoom or lighting functions either.

THE DIRECTION-IDIOT TEST:

Simply start up the preloaded maps app, tap a button to find out where you are, and another to find out the direction you're facing. I realise it's impossible to get lost with the iPhone when travelling on foot. But as there's no voice-guidance during driving navigation, you have to keep your eye on a blue dot at all times to know where you're going.

THE PRICE OF THE APPLE IPHONE 3GS DEPENDS ON YOUR OPERATOR PLAN.

VERDICT: While the iPhone doesn't perform in terms of its battery life, camera and SMS typing, it pulls ahead of its competitors thanks to its user interface and sheer number of apps. Hopefully, the next version will fix its flaws so its popularity will be justified.



Sony Ericsson Xperia X10

The flagship item in Sony Ericsson's soon-to-be-unveiled family of Android-based phones, the X10 comes packed with some mean features.

THE MUSCLE TEST: I love the X10's curve-slide unlocking system. The phone runs on the Google Android Donut system, and has a 1GHz processor. Continuing to build on the brand's reputation of being music-minded, the X10 has two new functions — Mediascape allows the consolidation of music, photos and videos in one location and Timescape manages all your communication with one person in one place. The phone also comes with a 4-inch 480 x 854 pixel scratch-resistant screen, but the cherry on the cake has to be free viewing of four channels from MobileTV's Entertainment Pack. If I need more entertainment, all I have to do is connect to the Android Marketplace with my Google account to download more apps.

THE SMS/WALK TEST: The lack of an alphanumeric keypad and a vibration acknowledgment after tapping makes typing SMSes while walking extremely hazardous. I nearly have a collision with a wandering tourist while trying to reply to a friend. Eventually, I have to stop, type out my message, then continue on my way.

THE CAMWHORE TEST: An 8.1-megapixel camera with 16x digital zoom, auto focus, face recognition features, smile detection, image and video stabiliser, photo and video light, and geotagging? What's there not to like? It's also got a fast response time and a shutter-activation button located on the side of the phone. Self-portrait taking is a breeze!

THE DIRECTION-IDIOT TEST: Loaded with Google Maps and a trial version of Wisepilot turn-by-turn navigation, you won't get lost with the X10 — until the trial version expires.

VERDICT: The X10 may have the features but somehow, it still comes across as a music player phone with additional features rather than a smartphone. But if you're looking for a fun smartphone to match your lifestyle and love for music and social networking, this is it.

SONY ERICSSON XPERIA X10 RETAILS AT \$1,088 WITHOUT OPERATOR PLAN.



MYTH:

Oil is bad for your skin.



Google Nexus One

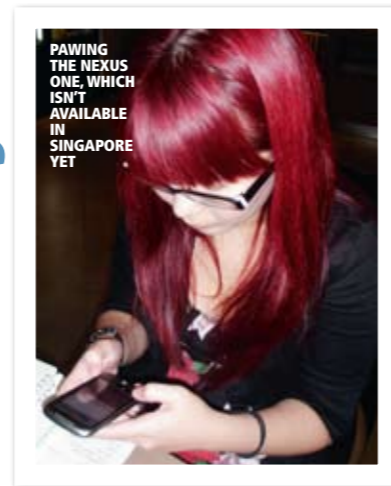
Sold exclusively on a web store hosted by Google, the Nexus One combines the latest in hardware from HTC Corporation with the newest Android Software. This is for those who can place their faith in a phone without touching and feeling it themselves first.

THE MUSCLE TEST: Big screen and crystal-clear visuals? Check. The Nexus One has a 3.7-inch 480 x 800 pixel display screen, and its display is not compromised because it's powered by a 1GHz processor. Staying connected is very important to me, and I find that setting of emails, whether it's Microsoft Exchange or Yahoo, is a breeze. To me, the best feature of this phone is the fact that it comes with three microphones and noise cancellation technology. Even when I'm out skiing and my boss calls me, she'll never know where I am! Just kidding, Debs.

But this feature does enhance call quality, and I don't have to plug my other ear with my finger (as I usually do) to hear the other party clearly. I'm ecstatic to discover that the Android Shopping Market has over 20,000 exciting apps available for download, and almost all of them are for free! The worrywart in me also loves how it's possible to remotely wipe out all personal data on the phone if I ever lose it.

THE SMS/WALK TEST: This phone proves it's possible to type an SMS on a full-touch mobile phone without looking at its screen. The QWERTY keyboard display is large enough to accommodate my stubby fingers, especially when rotated in the landscape mode. Add on its very responsive touchscreen, and SMSing while walking is a breeze. Of course, I can fully eliminate all potential collisions with lamp posts by choosing to speak my text message — simply speak clearly and slowly, and its voice-enabled keyboard will type in the message for you.

THE CAMWHORE TEST: The Nexus One features a 5-megapixel camera with flash and geotagging, and has an auto-focus and preview screen. Generally, my photos turn out very clear, and they can be arranged not just by chronological order, but by location as well. Unfortunately, the only way to take a self-portrait is to tap on the screen, which requires a bit of psychomotor coordination. Upon spotting a dreaded pimple in the picture, I download an app to edit it away.



Can the Nexus One perform well enough to match its sleek exterior?

THE DIRECTION-IDIOT TEST: Put a Google phone together with Google maps, and you couldn't get lost even if you wanted to. With Google Goggles, navigation is easy — take a photo of the street you're on, and based on GPS and geotagging, you'll be informed of your current location! I also use the voice recognition technology to search for directions and locations. The results displayed on Google maps are in 2D view, and this is the only phone with a 3D street view.



VERDICT: It may not be the most affordable phone around, but Google Nexus One definitely gives the iPhone a run for its money when it comes to features and apps. Rumour has it this exact phone may soon be brought in by HTC under a different name, which means operator subsidies and a lower phone price tag. We're keeping our fingers crossed!

GOOGLE NEXUS ONE RETAILS AT S726 AT WWW.GOOGLE.COM/PHONE. THE PHONE WILL BE DELIVERED WITH A POWER ADAPTOR SUITABLE FOR USE IN SINGAPORE, AND IF THERE ARE ANY FAULTS, YOU CAN BRING IT DOWN TO HTC. THE PHONE IS FULLY REFUNDABLE FOR 30 DAYS BUT YOU WILL NEED TO PAY A RESTOCKING FEE OF S62.

Q: What is the most important thing in a phone to you and why?

Three girls reveal what they look for in a smartphone.

"Phones with multiple functions take away the hassle of carrying many gadgets around. I love phones that keep me connected and let me access Facebook and Twitter." — NING, 21



"Design is important — a big screen is always better and it has to be attractive. But my one must-have is WiFi. Being able to access the Internet on the go is just so convenient." — JOANNE, 24



"Big screens make it easier for me to absorb what I'm looking at. I don't mind a bulky phone. I just need my information to be clearly visible." — CANDICE, 26



FACT:

DHC Deep Cleansing Oil is extra-good to your skin.



OVER 300,000 SOLD MONTHLY IN JAPAN!

Containing premium Spanish olive oil, DHC Deep Cleansing Oil rinses off easily with water and leaves no greasy residue to clog pores. It deep-cleanses effectively while retaining moisture and providing protection for all skin types, including sensitive skin.

Try DHC Deep Cleansing Oil and find out why it's a DHC worldwide best-seller.



Now available at the following Watsons stores: Bugis Junction • Compass Point • East Point • Hongkong Mall • ION Orchard • Ixora • Jurong Point • Lee J • Ngaz Ann City • Parkway Parade • Raffles City • Tampines 1 • Tampines Mall • VivoCity • Wisma Atria and other selected Watsons stores