

Going Mobile (Part 3): Finding the Perfect Wireless Phone

By Donna Schwartz Mills

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Going Mobile, Part 3: Finding the 'Perfect' Wireless Phone
by Donna Schwartz Mills
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So you've done your homework: You have a clear idea of how and where you'll be using your phone. You know how many "any time" minutes you need and have selected a carrier who covers the region you'll be in most often. It's time to go shopping for your handset; your telephone which will likely be a part of your workspace for the next year or two.

Your new carrier may offer you a free or discounted phone with your contract. This may be all you want or need. After all, today's free phones have all the features that were sexy and new two years ago... and that may be enough. Then again... if you want the latest and the greatest, you may want to look into an upgrade.

Wireless phone companies heavily subsidize the cost of handsets, especially to their new customers. This can result in a significant discount -- sometimes as much as a couple of hundred dollars off the retail cost of a new phone. So the question is -- what features do you need or want? And before you can respond to that, you need to know what is possible. The answer might amaze you.

There are people out there who feel they MUST have the very best in wireless phone products. These folks flock to a site called PhoneScoop, which carries wireless telephone news and reviews of models on the market -- some of which have yet to hit U.S. shores. Check out their "Phone Finder" to select

a model that's right for you:

<http://www.phonescoop.com/phones/finder.php>

Among the variables they'll ask you about are easy ones, like weight, antenna type and style (flip, folder, slide, etc.) But then the list of possibilities is dizzying:

- * Will you be traveling outside the country? Then you might need World Roaming.
- * Most wireless phones have some address book capacity. Others also have alarms, calendars, calculators and other organizing functions and may serve as a substitute for a PDA. (Hey, there are even hybrids that run on Palm OS or Windows CE)
- * You will soon be hearing a lot about Bluetooth - this is a technology that enables electronic devices (like computers, PDA's, telephones) to work together as a wireless network. You may not be using it now - but some of the hottest phones have it built in... so when you do, you'll be ready.
- * Say "Cheese!" One wireless carrier has been putting a lot of money advertising their new "Vision" function, allowing you to send digital photos through your wireless telephone. Of course, you need a special handset for this. And while at this writing, the phones on the market do not include the digital camera you need, there are some waiting in the wings.
- * Lots of wireless users have fun customizing their phones with colorful faceplates and different ringtones. But not all phones allow you to do this -- if you want yours to play the theme from Spongebob Squarepants when it rings, you'll need a phone that has this feature enabled. Some even have ringtones that are "polyphonic," which means that they can simulate the sound of up to 40 different instruments.
- * If you spend a lot of time away from your home office, data capability may be a real convenience. Check email, surf the web -- some phones will even allow you to receive faxes on the go.
- * Do you do a lot of purchasing by phone? You may benefit from the security of a built-in "digital wallet."
- * Some phones have a GPS (global satellite positioning) feature, which means that an emergency call to 911 could give the operator your exact location. A definite plus for those concerned with security issues.

- * While we do not advocate talking on your wireless while driving, we recognize that people will do so as long as it's legal. You can at least minimize your risks by selecting a phone with some hands-free options, like a headset jack or speaker and voice dialing.
- * SMS and MMS are systems for sending and receiving text messages. MMS is a more advanced system found in some of the newer Nokia phones -- in addition to text, you can send graphics, photos and audio clips.
- * We're all familiar with Caller ID. Well, some wireless phones include something called Picture ID, which allows you to associate your caller's picture with his or her number.

Once you have submitted your selections, PhoneScoop's search engine will give you back a list of phones that meet your criteria, and which carriers are likely to offer them. Now your real fun begins -- trying to actually *find* these models and get the best price.

Do go to your preferred carrier's store to see and hold the models you are interested in. A salesperson may even be helpful and knowledgeable about the phone's features (but don't count on it!)

But before you sign, be sure you also visit your carrier's website - many offer deals for those who order their service online, which could result in some significant savings.

Note that the cool models suggested by Phonescoop may cost you a pretty penny at the dealer. Here is a sample of what you're likely to find for \$50 and under at this writing:

- ** Nokia 3395: Has alarm, calculator, currency converter, can accept custom faceplates, includes 35 ringtones and the capacity to download 20 more plus a ringtone composer, five games, text messaging, voice dialing and wireless Internet. Battery life nearly four hours, seven days standby.
(Free from Cingular Wireless)
- ** Motorola T193: Alarm, calculator, calendar, custom faceplates, 11 ringtones, one game, a headset jack, wireless internet using high speed data technology, and text messaging. Battery Life is four hours, four days standby.
(Free from T-Mobile)
- ** Kyocera KWC 2235: Has alarm, calculator, 25 ringtones plus you can customize them using Kyocera desktop

software, high speed wireless internet capability, four games, headset jack, text messaging, voice dialing and voice memo. Battery life is just under four hours, six days standby.
(\$49.99 from Verizon)

** Samsung SPH-N240: Has alarms, calculator, calendar, to-do list, two games, GPS, headset jack, 20 builtin polyphonic ringtones, voice dialing. Battery Life is just two hours, eight days standby.
(\$49.99 if purchased online with new service by Sprint)

So that's what you can get for nearly free. How much more can you have if you're willing to shell out \$100-\$400?

Let's look at one of the most popular phones on the market right now: the Motorola v60.

The v60 is a clamshell-type phone with a second display feature on the front cover, which allows you to see who's calling without first opening the phone. (Convenient if you're screening your calls.) You can customize its look with replaceable front and back covers -- one of several accessories which make this model the love of wireless phone junkies everywhere. These include an FM stereo headset and MP3 player as well as a nifty handsfree car kit.

Other built-in phone features include an alarm, calculator, calendar, games, text messaging, voice dialing, voice memo, and wireless internet capability. Battery life is four hours talk and up to 10 days standby.

Almost every carrier in my area offers a version of the v60 with prices varying from \$199 to \$299 -- for NEW customers. Depending on the carrier, existing customers may have to pay close to the retail price of \$379 (listed on Motorola's website for purchases without new activation of a plan).

For some inexplicable reason, once your contract ends and you decide to upgrade to a newer phone, many of the carriers will charge you retail - even if you re-up with a new two-year contract. In my opinion, this is a great way to encourage your long-time customers to switch service providers.

But the bottom line is: are the extra features in the "premium" models enough to warrant paying the extra money? The description of the Motorola v60 above doesn't differ all that much from that of another Motorola model, the T193, which one carrier is *giving away* to new customers. In fact, it's got just about every feature most home-based entrepreneurs would need.

With mobile phones, you may not be able to have it all...

but by doing your homework and careful comparisons, you can come close -- and save money to boot. Which is better music to my ears than any old ringtone!

Donna Schwartz Mills writes about the specific needs of work at home parents at her website, The ParentPreneur Club, "For Parents Who Want Choices, Not Office Politics." Tools, tips and advice you need to help grow your home based business while raising a family.

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