

Questions from the article **Are You Prepared to Buy a Cell Phone?**

1. What was the specific goal or purpose of this article. In your opinion, did the author achieve this goal?

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2. According to this article, what is the advantage of a phone that is WAP-enabled?

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3. In the sentence, *When looking at phones with a headset or speakerphone connection, check to see if the plug is **proprietary***, choose the word below that best describes what the author means by the word **proprietary**?

- a. available
- b. universal
- c. included
- d. non-universal

4. Review the section of **Included Functions**. Choose the one you feel is the most important, and explain why.

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**Communication Technology**

# Are You Prepared to Buy a Cell Phone?

*adapted from an article by Marshall Brain and Jeff Tyson*



*A digital cell phone from Nokia*

## Cell Phone?

Millions of people in the United States and around the world use cellular phones. They are such great gadgets -- with a cell phone, you can talk to anyone on the planet from just about anywhere!

These days, cell phones provide an incredible array of functions, and new ones are being added at a breakneck pace.

Depending on the cell-phone model, you can:

- **Store contact information**
- **Make task or to-do lists**
- **Keep track of appointments and set reminders**
- **Use the built-in calculator for simple math**
- **Send or receive e-mail**
- **Get information (news, entertainment, stock quotes) from the Internet**
- **Play simple games**
- **Integrate other devices such as PDAs, MP3 players and GPS receivers**

## Features to consider

When buying a cell phone, there are a number of different things or features you should consider:

- **Display**
- **Included functions**
- **Special features**
- **Size**
- **Battery type**
- **Price**
- **Service plan**

## Display (screen)

All cell phones have LCD displays, but the specific features of the display can vary:

**Size** - A large, multi-line display is typically more expensive, but it's necessary if you plan to use the phone for wireless Internet.

**Color vs. monochrome** - Most cell phones have monochrome displays (16 grays), but there are a growing number that have color. Cell phones with color screens need more memory and tend to be more expensive.

**Reflective or backlit** - Almost all cell phones have backlit screens, which are good for low-light conditions.

## Included Functions

Most premium phones offer all of these features, while more economical phones may only have a few:

- **Phone directory**
- **Clock**
- **Calculator**
- **Games**
- **Personalized/custom sounds**
- **Appointment reminder/calendar**
- **Incoming-number storage**
- **Automatic redial**
- **Last-number recall**
- **Mute/hold button**
- **One-touch dialing/speed dialing**
- **Voice-activated functions**
- **Vibrate mode**
- **Lock/ alarm**
- **Call forwarding**
- **Multi-party calls**
- **Hands-free headset/speakerphone**
- **External volume/ringer control**
- **Rapid charger/built-in charger**
- **Car adapter**

## Special Features

Some cell phones have special features such as:

- Text messaging
- Wireless Internet
- Modem function
- PC synchronization
- PDA
- MP3 player
- GPS receiver

When looking at phones with a headset or speaker-phone connection, check to see if the plug is proprietary. If it is, then check the cost and availability of the headset or speakerphone. Also, all phones come with a charger, but not all of them come with a rapid charger.

## Size

Think about how you plan to use the phone. Will it mostly be a car phone? Or do you plan to carry it in a pocket all day long? This will help you determine if that cheaper phone with the same features that weighs 10 ounces is a better deal than the one that only weighs 5 ounces but costs twenty percent more.

## Battery type

**NiMH (nickel-metal hydride)** - high capacity battery that provides extra power for extended use.

**Li-ion (lithium ion)** - has a lot of power in a light-weight package but usually costs more than NiMH batteries.

Note both the talk time and standby time when comparing phones. Also, check to see how long the battery takes to recharge and whether a rapid charger is available. Most cell-phone batteries are removable, but some of the smaller models have a built-in battery instead.

## Price

If you are like most of us, price is always a consideration. Weigh the options carefully and make sure that you don't pay for features that you probably will never use. If you are not interested in wireless Internet, then you may not want to pay the extra bucks for a WAP-enabled phone.

## Service Plan

Before you set your sights on a particular make or model of cell phone, you should decide on the service plan that interests you. Otherwise, you could find that the phone you want is not supported by the plan you need.

## Look Out!

***There are a few things you should be aware of when buying a cellular phone:***

### **If you travel a lot, will your phone work in a different state or country?**

With a digital signal, depending on your provider, your phone might work only over a certain region, or perhaps over your entire country. The problem is that there are several competing digital systems available -- and several different frequencies on each system. Ask your access provider for a map of exactly where the digital signal you will be accessing is available.

### **Are you worried about radiation?**

There have been several studies done, with conflicting results, on the effects of cell-phone radiation on the human body. The amount of radiation emitted from most cell phones is very minute. However, given the close proximity of the phone to the head, it is entirely possible for the radiation to cause harm. If you want to be on the safe side, the easiest way to minimize the radiation you are exposed to is to position the antenna as far from your head as possible. Utilizing a hands-free kit, a car-kit antenna or a cell phone whose antenna is even a couple of inches farther from the head can do this most effectively.

### **How much are you paying for long distance?**

Many access providers have special rate plans going constantly, some offering "free long distance." Make sure you ask questions regarding exactly what they mean, how long the special rates last and what exactly is considered to be "long distance." Also, before you get yourself into a long-term contract, be sure to find out about any surcharges you might be held responsible for.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### **Do cellular phones cause cancer?**

Studies indicate that cell phones emit minute amounts of radiation. This normally would be largely irrelevant, except that this radiation is in such close proximity to your head. It hasn't been proven that using a cell phone can cause cancer. However, there is enough evidence that you should at least be aware of the possibility that the radiation could be harmful if you are exposed to it for long periods of time.

### **What does the little card in the back of a digital cell phone do?**

The little card, called a SIM (subscriber identity module) card, is what allows your phone to access the global network. It contains your saved phone numbers, your phone number and your PIN number (personal identity number), which you must enter in order to use the phone. The card is transferable, so if you switch phones, you can simply switch the SIM card into the new phone and your phone number and other settings stay the same. If your phone is lost or stolen, your service provider should be notified immediately. They can inactivate the SIM card.

### **How can you send e-mail or access the Internet from a digital cell phone?**

If you have a WAP-enabled phone, then you are able to access the wireless Internet. This version of the Internet is specifically designed to be easily usable on cellular phones and other portable devices. Even if your phone is not WAP-enabled, you may still be able to send e-mail. Any phone that has SMS (Short Message Service) capability is able to send short text messages to Internet e-mail addresses, provided you purchase this service from your access provider.

### **How do you add personal ring tones to a cell phone?**

Certain cell phones allow the addition of personal ring tones to your phone. The easiest way to do this (if it is available on your model) is to directly "compose" a ring using your cell phone. Instructions are included with your phone if this feature is available. Otherwise, you have two options: You can buy a data cable specific to your phone and use software on a computer to compose a song and download it to your phone, or you may visit a Web site and have them send a special message that includes a ring tone to your phone (usually for a small fee).

## Cool Facts About Cell Phones

- ***Most newer digital cellular phones have some sort of entertainment programs on them, ranging from simple dice-throwing games to memory and logic puzzles.***
- ***Approximately 20 percent of American teens (more girls than boys) own a cellular phone.***
- ***Cellular phones are more popular in European countries than they are in the United States -- about 60 percent of Europeans own a cell phone, compared to about 40 percent of Americans.***
- ***The GSM standard for digital cell phones was established in Europe in the mid-1980s -- long before digital cellular phones became commonplace in American culture.***
- ***It is now possible to locate a person using a cellular phone down to a range of a few meters, anywhere on the globe.***
- ***3G (third-generation wireless) phones may look more like PDAs, with features such as video conferencing, advanced personal calendar functions and multi-player gaming.***