

Combine and conquer:

New phones help users multitask



Photo by Kok Foong Cheong and Ling Siang Wong

By Carly Mulliken

With a wave of new combination cell phones on the market, the world truly is at your fingertips – it just depends on how much you are willing to pay.

Combination cell phones are a unique class of mobile phones that have the capabilities of both a handheld computer and a cell phone. Well-known brands such as BlackBerry, Palm, Audiovox and Samsung have released phones that can meet many phone and Internet needs. Besides typical cell phone features, these phones allow users to check their e-mail or even download their favorite artists' new singles.

The newest member of the BlackBerry family is the 7130, which, among other fea-

tures, boasts a sleeker shape than its older siblings. Similarly, the newest Palm, the Treo 700, has been tweaked to improve upon Palm's older models. Likewise, the Audiovox PPC-6600 boasts huge advances over its predecessors. Samsung recently has entered the market with its first combination cell phone, the SCH-i730.

Common features

These phones have a few important similarities. First, all of the phones are Bluetooth capable. Bluetooth is a wireless technology that allows users to operate their phones via a headset from up to 30 feet away. Other Bluetooth capabilities include the ability to exchange contact or scheduling information with other phones

or computers and to play games against other Bluetooth users. The power of Bluetooth comes with a price; compatible headsets cost anywhere from \$50 to \$100.

All of the phones give users the ability to check their e-mail and also to surf the Web via a wireless connection. They all have the same data transfer speed, which determines the speed of the Internet connection. Another function the phones share is "PC Sync." This function allows a user to connect the phone to a computer with a cable and share contact and scheduling information. Finally, the phones all come with a color LCD display.

The Lineup



Photo courtesy of www.smartbcmobility.com

Audiovox PPC-6600

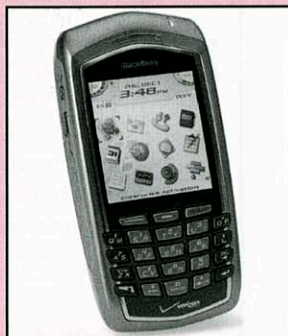


Photo courtesy of www.pcmag.com

Blackberry 7130



Photo courtesy of www.amazon.com

Samsung SCH-i730



Photo courtesy of www.amazon.com

Palm Treo 700

The contestants

Of course, it is the differences between the phones that determine which one fits your personality and needs.

The Palm Treo 700, which earned top marks from popular phone review site *phonescoop.com*, tied the BlackBerry 7130 as the smallest phone. It also is the second lightest and has the longest battery life. Other notable characteristics of this Palm are its ability to play MP3s, take pictures and capture and stream video.

The BlackBerry 7130 is the smallest in the BlackBerry lineup. It is the lightest of the phones and has the second shortest battery life. Unlike the other three phones, which use Windows for Pocket PCs as their operating system, BlackBerry uses its own "Enterprise" software. This phone has the least memory available, but the ease of transferring information between a computer and the phone offsets this weakness. Important features of the BlackBerry include its ability to function as a modem between a computer and the Internet. The BlackBerry contains Java 2 Micro Edition, which allows the phone to run different software specifically built for mobile devices, such as corporate applications.

These last two features of the BlackBerry can make the phone a vital tool in the business world.

The Samsung SCH-i730 is the second smallest of these phones but shares the title for largest LCD screen with the Audiovox PPC-6600. It is the second heaviest of the phones and has the shortest battery life. The phone has stereo speakers which enhance its ability to play music, games and stream videos.

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The last, and largest, of the phones is the Audiovox PPC-6600. Not surprisingly, it also is the heaviest of the group. The Audiovox's battery has the second longest life of the phones. The Audiovox has a music player and a camera and can capture and stream video.

The bottom line

The bottom line will always be how much you are willing to spend on an item, no matter what amazing features it may contain. Prices vary slightly by carrier. Verizon Wireless currently lists the Palm and Samsung both at \$499.99 and the BlackBerry and Audiovox at a more affordable \$299.99. These prices require the customer to sign up for a two-year service contract. Users must consider what type of coverage they are willing to pay for, which affects where they will get service and how fast their connection will be.

The future

The phones in this article are all relatively new, but there are always more products on the horizon. For example, the Motorola Q--which is due for release shortly but was not out as of press time--boasts similar technology to the other phones, but with a few improvements. The Motorola Q is Bluetooth-ready and has e-mail and Internet capabilities similar to the other phones. One of the key improvements is that the Q is smaller and lighter than any of the others. It also will run on a new operating system that is not yet available for any other phone. Motorola claims that the phone will be perfect for corporations wishing to improve their mobile communication capabilities. Assuredly, another company will follow with similar claims for an even fancier new product. **WE**

Author Bio: Carly Mulliken is in her final semester at UW-Madison and is delighted to be spending time working with the Wisconsin Engineer Magazine again. This is her fifth article.

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