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From the Sept. 2007 Issue

By now, you've surely been flooded with information on Apple's iPhone (www.iPhone.com), from the seemingly constant stream of TV ads to technology pundits who have generally praised the device, at least for its concept if not for its actual effectiveness. The concept is, indeed, great: Combining a person's music/video player with their smart phone/PDA just makes more sense than lugging around two similarly sized gadgets.

Note: A few days after this issue (and this column) initially printed, Apple announced that the 4GB version of the iPhone would be discontinued and that pricing for the 8GB model would be dropped from \$599 (listed in this column) down to \$399. The company is also offering consumers who purchased either model at the full initial price a \$100 Apple Store credit. ~ Isaac

But despite being first to market with the device, and despite having the lion's share of the portable music market with its iPod, Apple's iPhone will not take over the smartphone market for several reasons, and, more importantly, it will have little if any impact on the business market. It simply doesn't meet the needs of business users, and you probably won't end up with one, unless you're one of those "Apple People" who absolutely must have an iPod, iBook, Mac or anything else Steve Jobs comes up with.

No Outlook Integration

It is little secret that Apple and Microsoft don't like each other, and it seems like they

go out of their way to prevent their devices and programs from supporting devices

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Other Applications

Many other business-oriented programs are designed for use on mobile devices, including advanced contact management, time and billing, GPS dispatching tools, inventory data synching and industry-specific tools. None of these will offer iPhone versions for awhile, if ever, because the developers will need to build new versions of the systems to run on the iPhone platform. To do this, Apple will need to provide the developers with the code base, which is something that neither Microsoft nor Apple likes to do. [Note: Right before this issue went to press, NetSuite announced that it's online suite of accounting, CRM and e-commerce programs is compatible with the iPhone. So development is starting, and the NetSuite system is well-respected, but the iPhone still has a long way to go to catch up with BlackBerry.]

The iPhone also lacks some of the features traditionally found in smartphones, including instant messaging, voice dialing, voice recording and GPS capabilities, and it does not have a memory card slot.

Ma Bell

At the heart of any smartphone is its wireless capabilities. Apple chose AT&T (formerly Cingular, formerly AT&T) as its wireless service provider. AT&T has one of the largest networks in the United States, so if you had to pick one provider, this was an okay choice. But why did Apple have to pick only one provider? Unfortunately, this leaves out many potential users in the northern Great Plains states and Alaska, along with pockets around the rest of the country who cannot get AT&T wireless service. Also, many wireless experts have questioned whether AT&T will be able to handle the bandwidth issues associated with all of the features on the iPhone.

Cost

At \$500 to \$600, the iPhone has a somewhat steep price-point for a business

communications device, especially compared to the \$300 to \$400 pricetag you'll find

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Battery Life

Just like the iPod, the iPhone has a built-in rechargeable battery that cannot be replaced by the user. When it reaches the end of its rechargeable life, the device has to be returned to Apple (possibly to an Apple store) for the battery to be replaced for a fee.

But it's Cool

Okay, I'll admit that I think the iPhone is really cool. But it's an entertainment and personal communications gadget, not a business tool. I'm not an Apple fan, and I won't be getting an iPhone. But I do believe the company has had an influential positive impact on design through its previous products and will have a very strong impact with the iPhone. For starters, its buttonless design with exclusively touch-screen functions may be the wave of the future. And the full web browser, instead of the basic WAP (wireless access protocol), will greatly enhance the Internet experience of the user. Plus, Apple and Google have teamed to add enhanced Google Maps functions. Unfortunately, the iPhone does not support Flash or Java technology on websites.

Another unfortunate aspect is that Apple has traditionally been extremely proprietary about its creations, at least with respect to its computers and iPods, which has limited potential growth around the devices through third-party add-ons and other technologies. Apple will likely treat the iPhone the same way. But soon (very soon I suspect), there will be similar devices from other vendors that also add MP3 functions to the communication capabilities of a smartphone. When these products hit the market, businesses will still be faced with a cost-benefit perspective that results in primarily the addition of entertainment, but at least the rest of the communication capabilities will be up to par with business needs.

This is also Cool!

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The chief concern is letting the keyboard dry, but you don't want to use the heated drying cycle in the dishwasher, since it might damage the keyboard's internal wiring. Instead, dry it upside down and for at least a couple of hours before trying to use it. My experiment was a success, so far, although I am a little concerned about whether the innards of the keyboard will suffer corrosion.

Keep in mind that I did this with an old, extra keyboard that I no longer use. So I wouldn't have been terribly upset if it had failed. Don't try this at home unless you don't mind replacing the keyboard (but there are a lot of cheap models out there now).

There are also technology companies that make keyboards specifically designed to be washable, which would be a welcome addition to work environments that are either inherently dirty (mechanics, construction sites), or those that have sanitary concerns (schools, medical facilities). Unotron (www.unotron.com) offers washable keyboards and mice, including wireless models, along with a washable SmartCard reader. The company recommends washing the devices in a sink or washbasin, not a dishwasher. Unotron's products are also available at Dell (www.dell.com).

Oh, my Google search also found a few nuts who wash their keyboard in the shower with them. Hopefully they unplug it first.

Technology

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