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STATE OF THE ART

Apple Waves Its Wand at the Phone

By DAVID POGUE Published: January 11, 2007

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Illustration by Stuart Goldenberg

Remember the fairy godmother in "Cinderella"? She'd wave her wand and turn some homely and utilitarian object, like a pumpkin or a mouse, into something glamorous and amazing, like a carriage or fully accessorized coachman.

Evidently, she lives in some back room at Apple.

Every time Steve Jobs spies some hopelessly ugly, complex machine that cries out for the Apple touch — computers, say, or music players — he lets her out.

At the annual Macworld Expo in San Francisco, Mr. Jobs demonstrated the latest result of godmother wand-waving. He granted the wishes of millions of Apple followers and rumormongers by turning the ordinary cellphone into ... the iPhone.

At the moment, the iPhone is in an advanced prototype stage, which I was allowed to play with for only an hour; the finished product won't be available in the United States until June, or in Europe until the fourth quarter. So this column is a preview, not a review.

Already, though, one thing is clear: the name iPhone may be doing Apple a disservice. This machine is so packed with possibilities that the cellphone may actually be the least interesting part.

As Mr. Jobs pointed out in his keynote presentation, the iPhone is at least three products merged into one: a phone, a wide-screen iPod and a wireless, touch-screen

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Internet communicator. That helps to explain its price: \$499 or \$599 (with four or eight gigabytes of storage).

As you'd expect of Apple, the iPhone is gorgeous. Its face is shiny black, rimmed by mirror-finish stainless steel. The back is textured aluminum, interrupted only by the lens of a two-megapixel camera and a mirrored Apple logo. The phone is slightly taller and wider than a [Palm Treo](#), but much thinner (4.5 by 2.4 by 0.46 inches).

You won't complain about too many buttons on *this* phone; it comes very close to having none at all. The front is dominated by a touch screen (320 by 480 pixels) operated by finger alone. The only physical buttons, in fact, are volume up/down, ringer on/off (hurrah!), sleep/wake and, beneath the screen, a Home button.

The iPhone's beauty alone would be enough to prompt certain members of the iPod cult to dig for their credit cards. But its Mac OS X-based software makes it not so much a smartphone as something out of "Minority Report."

Take the iPod features, for example. As on any iPod, scrolling through lists of songs and albums is a blast — but there's no scroll wheel. Instead, you flick your finger on the glass to send the list scrolling freely, according to the speed of your flick. The scrolling spins slowly to a stop, as though by its own inertia. The effect is both spectacular and practical, because as the scrolling slows, you can see where you are before flicking again if necessary.

The same flicking lets you flip through photos or album covers as though they're on a 3-D rack. All of this — photos, music collection, address book, podcasts, videos and so on — are synced to the iPhone from Apple's iTunes software running on a Mac or Windows PC, courtesy of the charging/syncing dock that is included.

Movies are especially satisfying on this iPod. That's partly because of the wide-screen orientation, and partly because the screen is so much bigger (3.5 inches) and sharper (160 pixels per inch) than those on other iPods.

The iPhone can get onto the Internet in two ways: using [Wi-Fi](#), at least when you're in the presence of a wireless hot spot, or using Cingular's disappointingly slow Edge network.

That's right: the iPhone's exclusive carrier will be Cingular. (Nor is the phone "unlocked"; you can't use it with any other carrier.) At least it's a quad-band G.S.M. phone, so it will work overseas.

You can also conduct text-message conversations that appear as a continuous chat thread. And like any smartphone, the iPhone can download e-mail from standard accounts at regular intervals. In fact, [Yahoo](#) will offer free "push" e-mail — that is, messages will arrive on the iPhone in real time, just as on a corporate [BlackBerry](#).

The iPhone is not, however, a BlackBerry killer. The absence of a physical keyboard makes it versatile, but also makes typing tedious.



A touch screen controls many of the functions of the Apple iPhone.

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Instead of raised alphabet keys, you get virtual keys on the screen. They're fairly small, and of course you can't feel them. So typing is slow going, especially for the fat of finger.

Fortunately, you don't have to be especially precise. Even if you hit the wrong "keys" accidentally, the super-smart software considers adjacent keys — and corrects your typos automatically. If what you actually managed to type is "wrlcme," the software proposes "welcome." You tap the Space bar to accept the fix. It works beautifully.

The real magic, however, awaits when you browse the Web. You get to see the *entire* Web page on the iPhone's screen, although with tiny type. To enlarge it, you can double-tap any spot; then you drag your finger to scroll in any direction.

Alternatively, you can use a brand-new feature that Apple calls multitouch: you slide your thumb and forefinger together (like pinching) or apart on the glass. As you do so, the Web page before you grows or shrinks in real time, as though it's printed on a sheet of latex. It works with photos, too, and it's wicked cool.

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