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STATE OF THE ART

New iPhone Arrives; Rivals, Beware

By DAVID POGUE Published: June 22, 2010

Apple's new iPhone, its fourth in four years, reaches stores on Thursday. Ordinarily, this is where you'd expect to find a review of it. But honestly — what's the point?



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Stuart Goldenberg

The iPhone 4 is already a hit. AT&T says that it received 10 times as many preorders as it did for the iPhone 3GS last year. On the first day of taking orders, Apple processed 600,000 requests — before its ordering system, and AT&T's, descended into chaos.

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In short, the public seems to be perfectly capable of sniffing out a winner without the help of tech critics.

On the other hand, the new model won't do anything for people who detest the iPhone. It wouldn't matter if the new iPhone could levitate, cure hepatitis and clean your gutters; the Cantankerous Committee would still avoid it.



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Jim Wilson/The New York Times

The iMovie app for the new iPhone lets you edit video clips and post them to YouTube.

Despite the strong initial, positive reaction, this must still be a nerve-racking time to be Apple; the iPhone is no longer the only worthy contender. Phones running Google's Android software are gaining rave reviews and packing in features that iPhone owners can only envy. The Android app store is ballooning, multiple phone makers are competing, and Google updates the software several times a year. Apple releases only one new model a year, so the new iPhone had better be pretty amazing to compete.

It is.

The first thing you notice is the new shape. Despite a beefier battery (16 percent more likely to last a full day), a faster processor and upgraded everything, the new model is still noticeably thinner and narrower than before. How is that possible? In part, the trick was squaring off the back.

It's no longer gracefully curved — a design that, if you think about it, created wasted space around the rectangular components. The new iPhone is two glass slabs, front and back, wrapped by a stainless-steel band.

The result is beautiful, and since there's no more plastic, it feels solid and Lexus-like. But it no longer feels like a soothing worry stone, and it's now impossible to tell by touch which

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way it's facing in your pocket. The new metal mute and volume buttons are much stiffer. Still, Apple says the iPhone 4 is the world's thinnest smartphone, and most people will approve of the trade-offs.

The new phone uses the same custom chip that's in the [iPad](#); it's really, really fast. It makes a difference every time you tap the touch screen.

It's not the first phone with both a front and back camera. It's not even the first one to make video calls. But the iPhone 4 is the first phone to make *good* video calls, reliably, with no sign-up or setup, with a single tap. The picture and audio are rock solid, with very little delay, and it works the first time and every time.

TECHNOLOGY

[The iPhone 4](#)

With David Pogue for NYTimes.com and CNBC This feature, called FaceTime, is pure Apple.

However, you can enjoy this classic "show Grandma the baby" fantasy only if you and Grandma both have the iPhone 4, and only when you're both in strong Wi-Fi hot spots. Both limitations may change in time; other software companies are free to create FaceTime-compatible programs for other gadgets. And Apple implies that next year, you'll be able to make such calls over the cellular airwaves. Clearly, Apple is giving its ball and chain, AT&T, time to get its network ready.

The new screen, with greater contrast, is excellent. It packs in four times as many pixels as before; at 326 dots an inch, it's now the sharpest phone screen on the market. Now, "the screen isn't sharp enough" wasn't exactly a common iPhone complaint before. But it's easy to see, and appreciate, the improvement in clarity of text, pictures and videos.

There's a new 5-megapixel camera, too —better, though it's still no rival to a real camera. The actual moment of photo-snapping is an instantaneous affair now, freed of the take-your-time sluggishness of last year's model. Apple has finally deigned to give us a small, bright LED flash, too. You can make it stay on when you're filming —a convenient video light for very close-range subjects.

Speaking of video: the new iPhone takes great-looking 720p high-definition video; now there's the equivalent of a Flip camcorder in your phone.

Furthermore, for \$5, you can install iMovie for iPhone. This little app lets you trim and rearrange video clips, add music and credits, drop in photos with zooming and cross-fades, and then post the whole thing directly to [YouTube](#).

Frankly, the whole concept sounds a little ridiculous; video editing on a phone? You might as well introduce [Microsoft](#) Excel for Hearing Aids.

But you watch. The way life goes, some iPhone production will win at Cannes next year.

Now, peculiar as it may sound, phone calls have always been the iPhone's weak spot. It took too many steps to dial. Audio quality wasn't state-of-the-art. And from Day 1, dropped calls in several big cities have driven people there wiggly.

With the iPhone 4, Apple tried to relieve the wigginess. Sound is much better on both ends of the call, thanks in part to a noise-canceling microphone and an improved audio chamber (which also helps speakerphone and music sound). The stainless-steel edge band is now part of the antenna. The new phone is also better at choosing the best channel for connecting with the cell tower, even if's not technically the strongest one. (Ever had four bars, but a miserable connection? Then you get it.)



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Does any of this mean no more dropped calls in New York and San Francisco? No. But there do seem to be fewer of them.

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E-mail: pogue@nytimes.com

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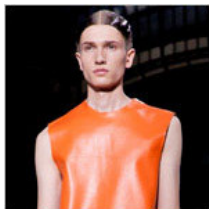
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