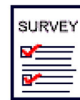


The Wayback Machine - <https://web.archive.org/web/20010216041714/http://www.geek.com:80/hwswrev/pda/ericr380/>



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PDA REVIEW

Ericsson R380 Smartphone

Reviewer: **David Bowman**

Posted: 11/24/00



RATINGS	
Quality	   
Geekness	    



At A Glance

Description

A very wireless Internet connectivity-oriented smartphone that delivers essential communication in a small package, along with basic PDA/PIM functions

Highlights

Great form factor; e-mail from the road; WAP is a breeze and an enjoyment; built-in modem works with every conceivable IR device

Lowlights

No caller groups in this version of software; the pen could be more sturdy; no space for software or hardware updates

Manufacturer

[Ericsson](#)
[R380 site](#) (you need Flash); here's [another part of the site](#) to look at

Street Price

In the neighborhood of €900 (euros) (US\$875)

Not many things can replace the "Trinity, I need an exit" look and feel of the [Nokia 7110](#), or the "Darn, that's a PHONE, not a ZIPPO" je-ne-sais-quoi of the 8210.

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So take a look at this, the Ericsson R380:



"Dang it, that thing is ugly!" is the reaction half of you are having right now. Thick, wide, long, strange antenna (remember, this is from a European point of view).

So what does it do?

Well, it reads e-mail (POP and SMTP), it uses WAP, there's a note-taking application, a calendar, contacts, clock, calculator, and a game. And now, the major surprise--you can even make phone calls with it.

R380 features include:

- GSM 900/1800 dual band phone
- Touch screen with back light
- Uses WAP system for Internet access
- Built-in modem
- EPOC operating system
- Flip cover with keys
- Large display
- Infrared communication
- Size of a mobile phone
- Address book
- Calendar
- E-mail and SMS
- WAP browser
- Voice notes
- Notepad
- Speaker phone
- Calculator
- Alarm clock
- PC synchronization
- Ericsson Mobile Internet

Actually, when I got the manual for this thing, my first question was, "Okay, it does all this, now where's the knife, screwdriver, and tweezers?" Throw away those Palm IIIs and Revos people, here's the all in one solution!

America has the Mobitex network--which is very cool. Wireless 'Net access independent of the phone lines is something we Europeans only dream of. But we have two of the greatest mobile phone manufacturers

in the world, Nokia and Ericsson, in Europe. And we get the cool "phone-related" gadgets way before the US does.

Well, this thing is one of those gadgets. At first glance, it looks like a semi-stylish Ericsson phone. A huge one at that. I mean, when you can get an 8210 at a significantly lower price than this one (the RRP for the monster you see in the pictures is €999 (euros), which is roughly US\$875). And reading e-mail on that teeny screen? Why the heck would you want to drag something like this around?

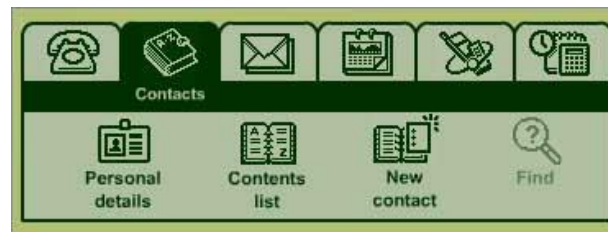
Well, it does this:



Close your mouths, all of you. You haven't seen anything yet.

We have WAP with secure WAP protocol (anyone want to pay the train ticket from the phone? This one will do that for you!). We have SMS reading and writing. We have POP3 and IMAP e-mail capabilities. We have a good address book, a fairly decent agenda, a clock, a calculator, a notepad, an IR modem, voice control of the phone (say "Answer" and the phone picks up), and we have dialing by saying the name of the person you wish to call. Enough? No?

Some screenshots (from Ericsson's Flash demo on the website):





Okay, as a special extra for "a limited time only" we'll give you the EPOC operating system, full compatibility with Psions' offerings, seamless syncing to Microsoft Office, and compatibility with any PDA that supports the vCard and vDate standards.

That's really it ... oh ... no, wait, it can also be used as a conference phone if you open the lid.

So, what you do is take the little flimsy plastic pen from its holder in the battery of the phone, open the keypad, and type away. Or, if you prefer, you can write away, with a very Graffiti-like system. Now, the 2 MB of RAM won't be enough for you to carry your doctoral thesis around, but it should comfortably hold all your contacts and appointments, a few score of e-mails and SMS, and a cached WAP page or two. And, let's face it, that's enough to get you through one day, maybe two, because that's about as long as the battery will hold.

While my phone is a pre-production model, and this probably won't be a "feature" in the actual sales version, the battery SUCKS. The phone, being used for what I consider normal usage (4 or 5 times of checking e-mail, about one hour of calls, and a few other tidbits, such as the odd SMS or looking up a phone number), croaked at 7 P.M., after being charged all the previous night. Not pathetic, but not impressive either.

Well, that about covers the bad points. All the rest is good stuff. At first, I must admit, I was a bit scared that the mail application only

supported the showing of the name of the person that sent the mail--my "mental sorting" relies heavily on the subject of the e-mail, since most mailing lists put the name of the list in the subject. You try sorting through 100-odd mails a day by name of the sender only, 50 of those mails from mailing lists and 15 more from people on those mailing lists, addressed individually to me.

Well, no problems, there. The option that shows the topic of the e-mail is there--just carefully hidden from the prying eyes of the casual user. Nothing stays hidden to us geeks, though. And the WAP on this phone is cool. Actually, it's über cool. The sheer size of the screen allows you to read your average WAP page without scrolling, and the secure WAP option is welcome as well--you can see the amount of money in your account before you try and charge a ticket to a maxed out card! :)

Actually, there is one more thing that I don't like: the total and utter lack of expandability, both hardware and software wise. 2 MB can be limiting (talk to any user with a Palm IIIe) and the fact that no additional software can be uploaded is a drag. I don't know what bothers me more: the fact that software cannot be added or the lame excuse that Ericsson made up: "It would induce a random factor into the GSM networks, and that factor might cause instability." I fail to see how loading Solitaire could make the GSM network unstable, although playing Snake across the GSM network in a pair MIGHT overload it :)

What I will need to sacrifice from using the 8210 (aside from the form factor) is the caller groups. This is, of course, another monumental stupidity on the part of Ericsson; the t28 has them, and the darn thing is about three times smaller than this phone. I'm sure it would have been perfectly possible to include that "minor detail" into the phone design, saving my voice mail from many unneeded messages.

This ranting probably makes it sound that the phone sucks and I hate it; actually, the opposite is true. The phone is the best thing since Spandex and Lycra on Victoria's Secret models. Nothing I've tried so far gives you the kind of power and accessibility in a form factor as small as this. Compared to this, the Nokia Communicator series is a brick--this phone will fit into your shirt pocket and not make you look too strange, while the 9110 will drag you to the floor and almost topple you over.

Ratings Defense

The Ericsson R380 gets 4 Geekheads for Quality. The quality is slightly better than "100% Taiwan," therefore the phone squeaks a bit when you hold it the wrong way; but the deduction of the full point is due to the rather pathetic opening mechanism of the keyboard, which is supported by two thin plastic hinges that are bound to break in a year of serious use. The hinges on my phone are squeaky already, and it's been only loaned to four people so far for a total time of one month.

The R380 gets 5 Geekheads for Geekness The Geekness factor with this phone is at an all-time high. The ability to do your work from the road is outstanding, and the stability of the EPOC operating systems is a joy for a geek.

The R380 also syncs with every PIM in existence (Yes, Joel, ACT! too ...), so you really should have no problem integrating it into your workplace!

If you're European, if you don't mind the size, and if you are good at spousal justification, I strongly recommend looking into this phone. If you're from the US, don't worry: the R380 world, which will feature the

1900 MHz frequency band, should be hitting the US in about two months. Read all about it in the [Ericsson press release](#), find a buyer for the pdQ brick in your pocket, and get ready to experience the bliss you'll get when you open the box and see this gem staring back at you. The wait will be well worth it.

Now, this phone definitely deserves a Geek.com Pick, and, as James said in the [Mitsubishi T250](#) review, gets it with one condition (or, better yet, it will get it when one condition is fulfilled): the 1900 MHz edition of the phone coming to the market, so that everyone will be able to enjoy the ease of use and the plethora of features of this downright excellent phone.



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