Smartphone history: A complete timeline

Alia Paavola December 19, 2022 4 minute read

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Smartphones have forever changed the way we live, communicate, work, and stay entertained. For many, these mobile devices have replaced landline phones, cameras, music players, and so much more. But how did smartphones become smart?

Below, you'll find a historical smartphone timeline: How we went from call-only to the catch-all device we know and rely on today.

mobile cellular phone

In 1973, Motorola engineer Dr. Martin Cooper and his team created a working mobile phone prototype. The first ever cell phone call was made in New York City – Dr. Cooper called Joel Engel, a rival researcher from Bell Labs. It was the start of a mobile device revolution.

1983 — First cell phone gets approval

A decade later, the first mobile phone, dubbed Motorola DynaTAC 8000X, was approved by the Federal Communication Commission. Nicknamed "The Brick," the handheld cell phone weighed nearly 2 pounds, had a 30-minute battery life, and was priced at $3,995.

In the same year, Ameritech introduced 1G to the U.S.

Motorola DynaTAC 8000X

1991 — 2G and lithium-ion batteries

In Finland, 2G launched on the Global System for Mobile Communications.

That same year, Sony and its engineer Asahi Kasei commercialize a lightweight and rechargeable lithium-ion battery. This was a revolutionary moment in the history of

1992 — First smartphone announced and first SMS sent

IBM engineer Frank Canova created a "smartphone" prototype with the code name Sweetspot. This is considered to be the first true smartphone. It was demonstrated at a computer industry tradeshow. While successful, it wouldn't be marketed to consumers for another two years.

In December 1992, the first text message was sent. It read "Merry Christmas" and was sent from Neil Papworth, an engineer at Sema Group.

1994 — First smartphone hits the market

IBM Simon Personal Communicator, a refined version of Canova's prototype, became available to consumers. It had a touchscreen and users could not only make phone calls, but receive faxes and emails too. IBM Simon also introduced

The phone had a price tag of $1,099 and sold 50,000 units in the first six months.

The first smartphone: IBM Simon

1997 — The term smartphone was coined and mobile

After three years on the market, the term "smartphone" entered the vernacular. It was first used by Swedish telecommunications giant Ericsson to describe its new mobile device called GS88.

The GS88 smartphone

It's hard to think of a world before Angry Birds, Pokemon Go, or Stumble Guys. But the reality is mobile gaming didn't start until 1997.

The first mobile game was Snake. The game was loaded on Nokia's 6110 hand-held mobile phones by Finnish developer Taneli Armanto. This launched the mobile gaming industry, which is now worth up to $152 billion.

Snake game on the Nokia phone

1999 — First front-facing camera phone and GPS

The first commercial camera phone, called the Kyocera Visual Phone VP-210, was released in Japan. It had a single front-facing camera. The device could snap up to 20 photos and send them via email, or snap 2 photos per second and send them via Japan's cellular network.

The same year mobile phone maker Benefon introduced the first commercial phone called Benefon Esc equipped with GPS technology. It was primarily sold in Europe but was a trailblazer for GPS in phones.

2000 — First back-facing camera phone

is considered the first mass-market camera phone.

2001 — Hello, 3G networks

For the first time, mobile phones could connect to the internet via 3G network. This marked the start of the widespread use of the internet on mobile phones.

2004 — Live-assisted GPS technology

U.S. electronics company Qualcomm invented and tested live-assisted GPS. This significantly improved live location accuracy.

2007 — First iPhone by Apple

Apple CEO Steve Jobs announced the world's first iPhone at the Macworld convention.

access. Its software capabilities were a turning point for the smartphone industry.

The first year on the market, Apple sold more than 1.4 million inaugural iPhones.

The first iPhone

2008 — First Android smartphone

The world's first Android-powered mobile phone entered the market. It was called T-Mobile G1, also known as HTC Dream. It had a touch screen, QWERTY keyboard and internet access. The phone physically slid to unveil the keyboard and had a BlackBerry-style trackball to help navigate.

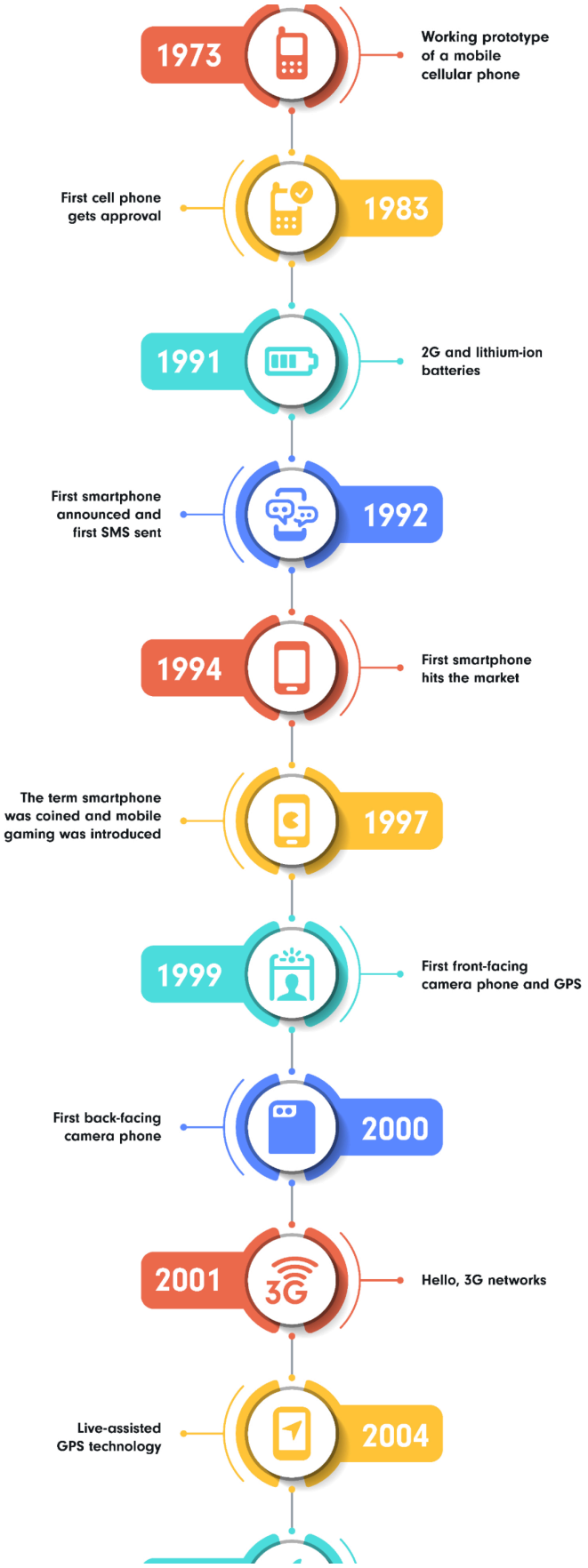
T-Mobile G1

2009 — 4G network

Swedish company Telia Sonera released 4G for commercial use. The 4G service enabled faster data transmission speeds – about 10 times faster than 3G.

2019 — 5G network

Verizon rolled out the first 5G network in the world. It had a relatively small footprint in Chicago and Minneapolis.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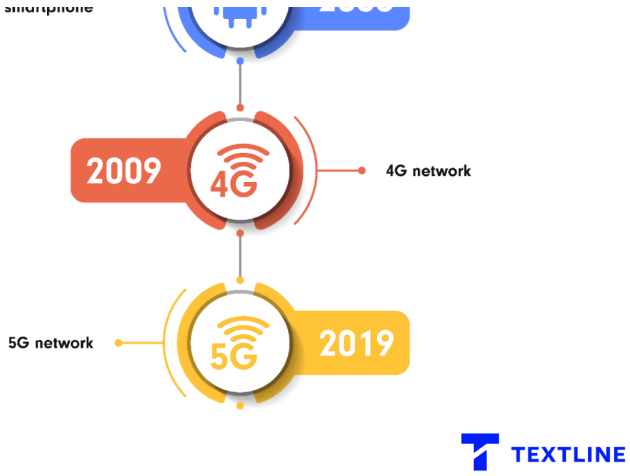

Timeline of smartphone history

Use the power of smartphones and texting to grow your business

Smartphones have opened the door for texting, which has become one of the most popular communication channels. Not just for personal communication but for business too.

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