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Review of the Motorola Droid from Verizon Wireless

October 31, 2009

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The Motorola Droid is Verizon's first smartphone running the much-touted "Android" operating system. The Android OS is fairly unique because it was built from the ground up by Google, and is released with a free software development kit – whoever wants to create applications for Android devices can do so. My understanding is that Google also had a lot of input into the Droid's hardware design. This means that the OS and the hardware were built to work well together, resulting in better performance.

The Droid is an excellent phone. Google, Motorola and Verizon really knocked this one out of the park. (I don't even like baseball, and I'm using a baseball euphemism. That's how impressed I am.)

As of this writing, you can visit “[DroidDoes](#)”, Verizon’s promotional site for the Droid. The site starts you off with a few blurbs about all the things the Droid does that the iPhone can’t do or doesn’t have (like having a removable battery, physical keyboard, multitasking, and open app store, etc). To my knowledge, this is the first cellphone that has had the guts to directly criticize the mighty Apple iPhone.

It can criticize Apple all it wants. The Droid holds its own. Easily.

Granted, there are some things the iPhone has that the Droid doesn’t, like true multitouch (being able to “pinch” the screen to zoom in and out). But the Droid doesn’t have anything to be ashamed about. My unscientific guess is that the perceived Droid performance is equal to that of the iPhone. It’s fast.

Major features

Here are the major talking points for the Droid as given to me by Verizon, and my comments about each:

Huge hi-resolution display – WVGA 854 x 480: It is indeed really nice. The 854 width (assuming you rotate the phone to landscape mode) means that most websites are easily readable without sideways scrolling or zooming.

Fast 550 MHz Cortex-A8 processor: It’s noticeably faster than any other smartphone I’ve used, with the exception of the iPhone. My subjective rating says it’s just as fast as the iPhone.

HTML5 Webkit: This means the Droid’s Internet browser supports more web page design methods, and will have fewer display and compatibility problems when browsing the web.

16GB memory in box: Great! Memory is getting cheap these days, but 16GB out of the box is big. The phone is also expandable to 32GB.

Best-in-class QWERTY keyboard: The keyboard to me was acceptable. It is super-thin – the 13.7mm size is the thinnest physical cellphone keyboard available.

5.0 MP Camera / DVD video: 5.0 MP capability means you’ve got great still picture quality, and can record movies in DVD quality.

Email support: By “email” they mean all the usual providers, and also native Exchange server synchronization. The Exchange support will wirelessly sync email, calendar and contacts.

Search Monster: I’m not exactly sure what this means. If I had to guess, it’s probably because the Droid’s interface has a lot of built-in search functionality. More on that later – see the below section on voice recognition.



Apart from the above, there are more points I'd like to talk about:

Additional features of the Droid

“Minor” features: We'll get the more common ones out of the way first. The Droid supports WiFi and Bluetooth. It multitasks – it supports six apps running at once. And (in a feature that's more overshadowed every year, now that smartphones have moved way beyond anything anyone expected), it's *aphone*, too!

This isn't a downloadable application, but don't forget to check the Droid's built-in battery life information – it'll tell you what specific applications are using what percentage of the battery. As you can see in the picture below, the display uses a lot of battery, which is why all cellphones have that auto-off timer for the display:



The Droid's case styling: The styling, surprisingly, is old-school. It seems little attention was spent on the styling of the case. The iPhone, of course, is the epitome of style, with a shiny, chrome feel and aerodynamic styling. You feel like you could throw an iPhone into a wind tunnel and it would just start to hover.

The Droid's case is a dull black. As my coworker visibly demonstrated to me with his own glossy black phone, a matte finish is actually good for black, since scuffs and scratches won't appear so quickly than if it's glossy. This phone will take some abuse. The shape of the phone is a rectangle, and the corners are only slightly rounded (compare that to the more rounded [HTC Imagio](#)).

The Droid is very solid and durable. It's thin, but heavy – there's a lot of hardware packed in there.

Keyboards: The physical keyboard slides out (there is no spring-loaded assist) and drops into position. I found the layout and design acceptable. Not great – I think the Treo line still has the best small physical keyboard, but the Droid's worked fine. The buttons could be raised higher to give a better tactile feel. But as the ads say, the Droid has the thinnest cellphone keyboard on the market – 13.7mm. In fact, the Droid's thickness is less than many cellphones without physical keyboards!

There is also a virtual keyboard if you don't want to slide out the physical one. I was satisfied with this – it was easy to use (and I have chunky fingers). There are also easy access virtual keys for “.com” and the ‘@’ sign. Extended characters are easily found.

Voice recognition: There is built-in voice recognition. From pages including the home screen and the browser, and specialized applications like YouTube, you can touch the microphone icon. Then speak. Your voice will be translated into text, and searched for on Google (or whatever application you're in).

Note that this is NOT just a copy-and-paste into the Google search tool. Or rather, it is, but there's intelligence behind it, thanks to the Droid's built-in GPS. For example, I said, “restaurants near me”, and, well, got all the restaurants near me. We're talking a handful of local results within a block or two of my test location! Or speak, “the evolution of dance” into the YouTube application, and your first result will be “The Evolution of Dance” video. Very cool, and this will save a lot of typing. (For the record, I'm an American with a midwestern accent.)

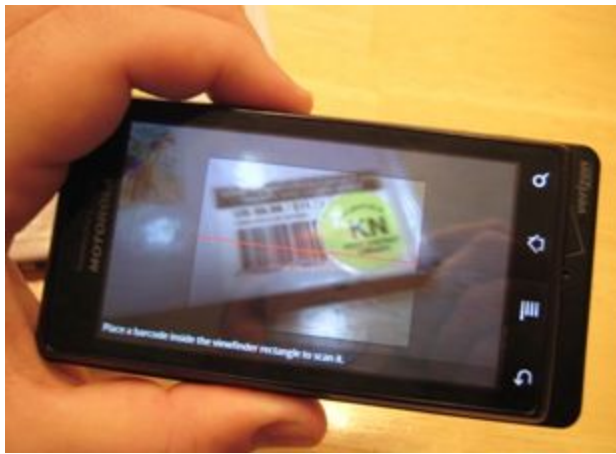
Google Maps Navigation: Once you use voice recognition to find a place (like a business or a specific address), you can use Google Maps Navigation to get there.

Google Maps Navigation is a combination of the Droid's GPS and Google's mapping application. It's live, constantly-updated turn-by-turn driving instructions. On the Droid, you get audio commands as well as visual, so you don't even have to look at the animated screen if you don't want to. It's available on Android-powered devices.

This deserves special mention because people are saying Google Maps Navigation will kill the GPS market. It will have an impact, definitely, but not if it's only on Android devices, like now. If Google can manage to port this application out to other devices, like all smartphones, then yes, the GPS market is in big trouble. That will probably happen one day. Our devices are becoming more and more integrated. Unless there are specific physical requirements, we no longer need a device specifically for GPS navigation in the same way we no longer need a device to add/subtract/multiply/divide numbers – there's the Calculator application for that. As smartphones take over the world, specialized single-use devices will inevitably disappear. To me, that's a great thing. Life becomes more efficient, functional and cheaper.

The Android Market: I saved what is arguably the best for last. The Android Market (simply called “Market” on the Droid) is the Google-powered Android application store. Download on demand thousands of free and paid software packages. They install fast, with just a click or two. Uninstalling them is just as easy. Games, productivity tools, communication tools, they're all categorized, rated by users, and available for you to get. I spent a long time on the app store. There's too much there for me to review, but I did find some applications that are good demonstrations of the power of the Droid. **Install these free programs to show off your Android smartphone:**

Barcode Scanner: Scan most barcodes (foods, books, toys), and you'll be taken to links with customer reviews, summaries and purchase options for what you just scanned.



Compass: This is literally a virtual compass. It uses the Droid's built-in compass hardware.

Google Sky Map: A beautiful program that allows you to hold the Droid up to the sky, above your head. When you do, the screen displays what you're looking at. Constellations, planets, stars and many Messier objects – it's a huge database, and you can filter to look at just what you want to see. Then, move the Droid to a new part of the sky, and it will detect the movement, and automatically scroll to show you what you're now looking at.

GPS Status: This readout shows all available GPS satellite information, compass and accelerometer readings, live:



Gravitu and Speed Forge 3D: These are fun games that use the accelerometer as their main interface. That means you don't press any buttons to play – just tilt the Droid forward and back, left and right, and the game will react. Gravitu is more of a puzzle game. Speed Forge 3D has good graphics and is a racing game (with a high learning curve).

Metal Detector: Yes, it literally turns your Droid into a metal detector! Hold the unit close to a ferromagnetic piece of metal, and the Droid will go wild. My understanding that this implementation is a modification of the compass hardware. No guarantees for you, but I was actually able to use this as a stud finder for the walls in my house.

The Schwartz Unsheathed: This is the simplest, but it's also my favorite: use your Droid as a Star Wars lightsaber! Hold the Droid still, and you'll hear the low hum of a lightsaber. Wave the Droid back and forth, and you'll hear that distinctive buzzing, swooshing lightsaber noise. Wave it fast, and you'll hear the cool electronic clash of one lightsaber striking another. I really, *really* wish I had this when I was a kid. Even now... well, I'm just glad no one was recording me when I was "testing" this application.

Motorola Droid review conclusion

One of the ways I rate the hardware I review is to ask myself, "would I personally want to own this product?" My answer is sometimes yes, sometimes no, but to my memory I've always been happy to have my current phone (a Treo 755p from Sprint). No more: the Motorola Droid is the first smartphone in recent memory that I **REALLY WANT**.

I would happily say goodbye to my current phone if I could get the Droid. It's a brilliantly-designed operating system with big potential on fast-performing hardware. Even though it's new, the already-huge app store is only going to get bigger and better, and the phone itself is completely open for development. The Droid has plenty of awesome features, and while there are a couple of design points that are up to personal preference, I didn't encounter ANY problems with this smartphone.

If I had a choice between an iPhone on AT&T's network, versus a Droid on Verizon's network, I would not pick the iPhone. I'd pick the Droid. No hesitation.

Yes, I've used the iPhone, and love its performance and versatility. Yes, I think the iPhone is an excellent, standards-setting, industry-changing phone. But, what the iPhone can't do, the Droid does. Most of what the iPhone does, I think the Droid does as well or better. The Droid is on a better network. The term "iPhone killer" has popped up now and then, and it's hard to say if the Droid is the iPhone killer because the race is so close. These are two devices that are completely out of the usual metrics – no one else can really compare to them. In my mind, the Droid is better, but the only objection I think others may have is the case design (which I personally don't care about). Give the Droid a new case, and you will indeed have an iPhone killer.

I want a Droid.

The Droid will be available on November 6, 2009 from Verizon Wireless. The price is \$200 with a new two-year customer agreement.

DROID with Google™ by Motorola

Talk and Standby Time	TT: 385 mins/6.4 hours – SB: 270 hours/11.25 days
Form Factor	Capacitive Touch; Full Qwerty Side Slider
Band/Modes 1	800/1900, CDMA EVDO rev A
OS	Android 2.0
Weight	169g/5.96oz
Dimensions	60.00 (x) x 115.80 (y) x 13.7 0 (z) mm 2.36(x) x 4.56 (y) x .54 (z)
Browser 1	Webkit HTML5 based browser 1
Email Support	IMAP and POP, Macmail, Gmail TM, MSN Hotmail and AOL 1
Battery	1400 mAh
Connectivity 1	Bluetooth ® v2.1+EDR 2 , 3.5mm Headset jack, USB 2.0 HS
Display	3.7", 480×854 WVGA
Display Resolution	WVGA display houses 400,000 pixels , up to 16 million colors
Messaging 1	SMS/MMS, Full HTML5 Browser 1
Audio	AMR-NB/WB, MP3, PCM/WAV, AAC, AAC+, eAAC+, MIDI, OGG

Video	Advanced Video record/playback at D1 resolution (720×480) at up to 24fps, MPEG-4, H.263, H.264
Camera	5.0 megapixel, AutoFocus, dual LED Flash and image stablization
Memory	16GB card included in phone
Location Services	1 aGPS, sGPS
Extras	802.11b/g , 3-axis accelerometer

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