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The Verge

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Jawbone Up fitness band review

Can a \$99 rubber wristband inspire owners to move more, sleep better, and eat smarter?

by **Thomas Ricker**

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Jawbone Up wet



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You're fat, lazy, and not getting enough sleep. At least that's what the consumer electronics industry seems to be saying with the recent deluge of fitness devices announced. In the last month alone, we've seen the introduction of the seventh generation iPod nano with integrated Nike+ sensor, the Fitbit Ultra clip-on sensor, and Motorola's MOTOACTV knockoff of the iPod nano + LunaTik watchband. And that's not even counting the myriad of dedicated cycling, running, and swimming computers targeting hardcore athletes over the same period.

See, fact of the matter is, we *are* fat, lazy, and tired, particularly in the US and increasingly in parts of the UK and Western Europe. According to 2008 statistics compiled by the US Department of Health Service, 68 percent of US adults are overweight or obese. Ironically, the US also leads the world in gym memberships with 50.2 million people (16.3 percent of the total population) toiling away in air conditioned sweat boxes. Unfortunately, 80 percent of those well meaning individuals don't actually use their memberships beyond the month of January — “resolution month” — resulting in about \$12 billion wasted each year. In other words, the recent glut of fitness products has nothing at all to do with corporate altruism; *there's gold in them thar cellulite hills!*

Today also marks the retail release of yet another fitness device: Up, by Jawbone.

While most of you know the Jawbone brand from its highly stylized Bluetooth earpieces, the company has branched out recently with its well-received Jambox portable speaker. The Up fitness wristband is meant to be worn 24-hours per day, every day. Like the Fitbit, Up includes an accelerometer that tracks your movement in order to give an estimate of your calories burned. It also features a sleep measurement mode that continuously measures your sleep cycle. However, unlike the Fitbit, Up can vibrate your wrist at just the right moment so that you awake feeling refreshed and ready to start the day. Or at least that's the claim. Up is also very much post-PC, meaning it connects directly to the iPhone's headphone jack to synch with a free app. Question is: is it worth \$99 given all the competition?

Hardware

Hardware

A hypoallergenic rubber skin is made to be sweat-proof and water-resistant to a distance of 1 meter

If you've seen a Jawbone Jambox then you're already familiar with the Up's rubber covering. The band itself is composed of a steel spring vertebrae that snaps rigidly into place around the wrist. It's hypoallergenic covering is made to be sweat-proof and water-resistant to a distance of 1 meter (about 3 feet).

There's no clasp on the wristband so it's easily removed and put on — faster than a wristwatch in most cases. In practice, mine has held up to daily showers over the last four days of testing. It dries quickly in the air or with a wipe of the towel.

Beneath the rubber epidermis you'll find a high-tech carcass made from a 10 day battery, a vibration motor for alarms, and a motion sensor

I don't wear a wristwatch on a regular basis, and when I do the strap is made from steel or leather. I found Up's rubbery texture to be mildly annoying, especially at first. The rubber can be sticky resulting in a slight but noticeable tug at the skin and hairs around the wrist, especially when the sweat begins to flow during a working out.

In general though, I found Up to be comfortable enough that I rarely noticed it except when it would stick inside a shirt sleeve while getting dressed. I also have to slide it up my wrist whenever placing my hands on the palm rest of my laptop.





Up's anatomy benefits from the miniaturization of sensors, batteries, and motors driven by demand for smaller and smaller smartphones. Beneath the rubber epidermis you'll find a high-tech carcass made from a built-in 10 day Li-ion rechargeable battery, a vibration motor for alarms, and a motion sensor. At one end of the band is a square multifunction button for putting Up in activity, sleep, or workout modes. Press-and-hold to switch between active and sleep modes; or press then press-and-hold to go into workout mode. Two indicator lights — a blue moon (sleep) and star (red when charging, green when in activity mode, or flashing green when in workout mode) — are neatly integrated into Up's skin and illuminate briefly to confirm your selection. Unfortunately, while the lights are easily seen in the gym, they are nearly invisible when outside in the sunlight. A 3.5-mm plug is on the other end, hidden by a Jawbone-branded cap. Now, about that cap...

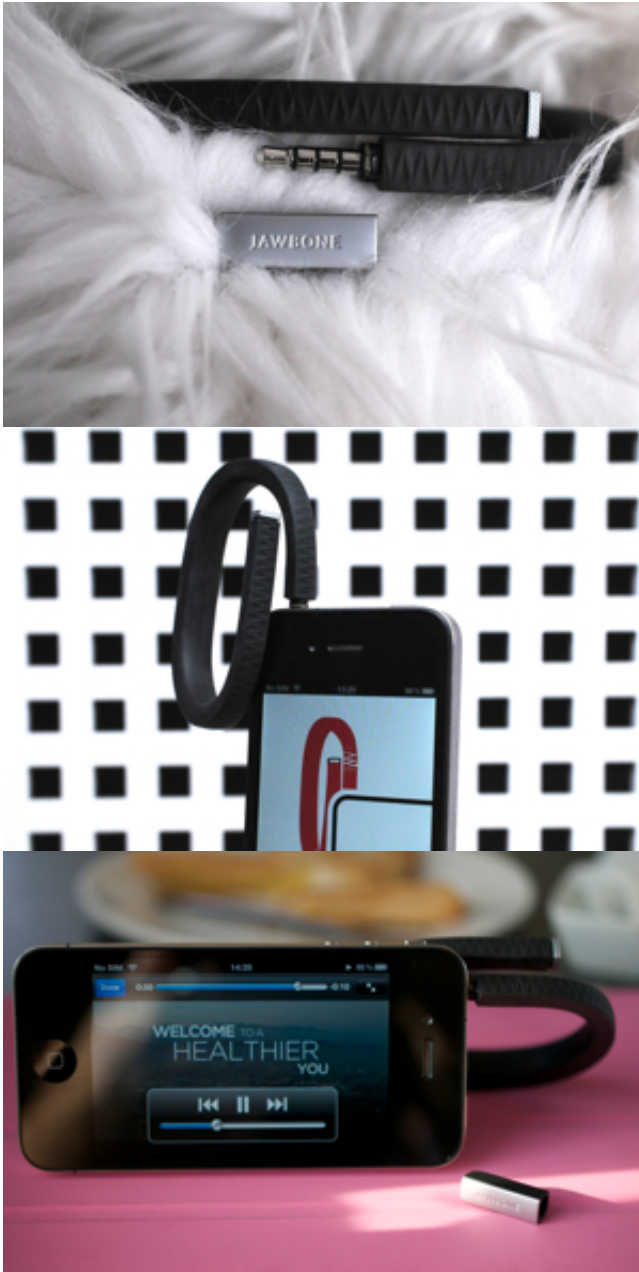
Eventually you will lose the plug cap, I'd put money on it

It's my guess that at some point in time you're going to lose the 3.5-mm plug's end cap. I remove and plug the Up into my iPhone three or four times a day: one in the morning to see how I slept, once or twice during the day to check my activity, and a final time at night to see how my overall day looked. That's three or four opportunities to lose the cap. Eventually, you will lose it, I'd put money on it. Fortunately, unlike the Fitbit device which can inadvertently pop off your belt and disappear (like mine did), the Up wristband itself is not likely to fall off your wrist without you knowing about it.

Update: Jawbone responded saying it will sell a pack of three replacement caps for \$9.99 on jawbone.com

If you haven't figured it out already, the Up mates directly with the audio jack of the iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad. It doesn't charge via the jack, naturally, but it will manually sync with the free Up iOS application. Jawbone claims full Up compatibility with the iPhone 3GS, iPhone 4 and iPhone 4S. It also support the iPad and iPad 2 but the Up app isn't formatted to take advantage of the iPad's larger screen. It does support the iPod Touch 4th generation and above but the GPS functions in the app are limited.

Oh, and as a bonus, the Up also makes a decent video viewing stand just as long as you don't mind listening to your video through the on-board speaker.



Software

Software

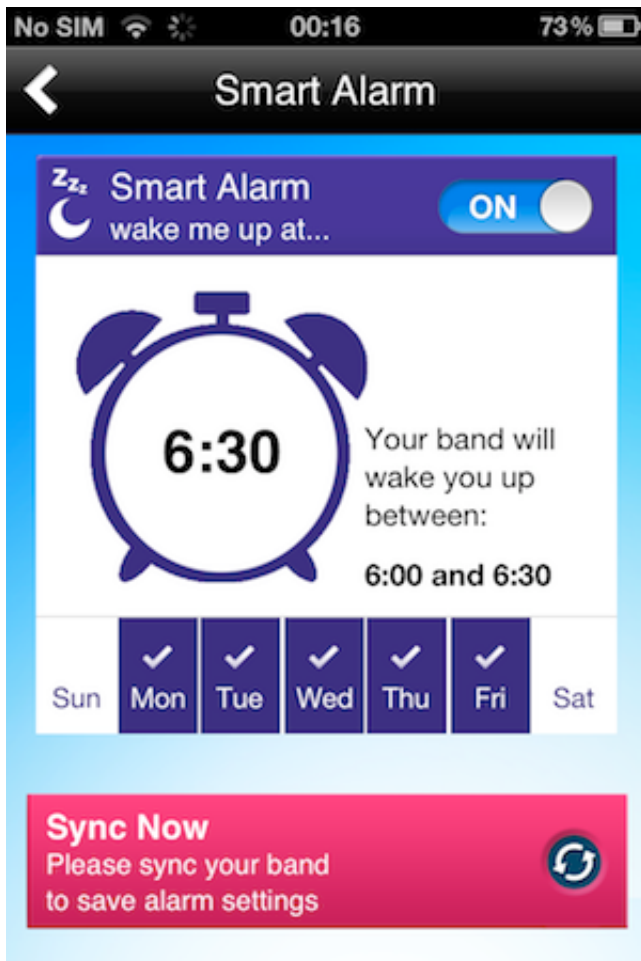
The polish is applied to a thin veneer — the app feels very much like a 1.0 product

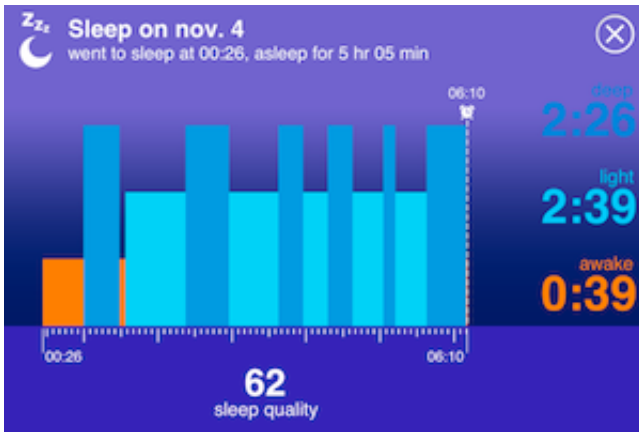


Up integrates the same Fullpower-MotionX engine already found in Jawbone's Era motion-controlled headset. It's this internal software that allows Up to make sense of the data collected by its motion sensor, converting it into steps, distance, calories burned, pace, intensity level and active versus inactive time. You sync data off the Up by attaching its 3.5-mm plug to your iOS device, launching the free Up app, and hitting sync.

The iOS app is free but not all that intuitive even though it features the kind of UI polish you'd expect from a Jawbone product. Unfortunately, the polish is applied to a thin veneer — the app feels very much like a 1.0 product (although it's listed as version 1.1 for launch) with its confusing structure and buggy operation.

In portrait mode you can see a segmented view of your sleep, activity, and meals. Rotating your device into the horizontal presents you with a detailed view of each segment ordered chronologically in a timeline. I ran into a bug more than once, where nothing would display on the landscape timeline until I swiped the screen. There's more finicky behavior if you tap the screen in portrait mode, as doing so will force the display into landscape. The only way to return it to portrait is to rotate the phone 90 degrees in one direction and 90 degrees back. With great lucidity and intent, I stripped Up off of my wrist and allowed my backup alarm to rouse me later





Sleep tracking

One of Up's potentially hyperbolic features is the programmable Smart alarm. Jawbone claims that Up "wakes you at the best possible moment in your natural sleep cycle." It does this through actigraphy, a non-invasive monitoring of your body's nocturnal activity (Fitbit does the same). In essence, putting the Up into sleep mode turns the device into a sleep actigraph where Jawbone's "proprietary algorithms" (as they were described to me) begin actively measuring your states of sleep based upon micro movements at the wrist (similar to eye flutter in REM). The data is then converted into hours slept, time to fall asleep, light versus deep sleep, and sleep quality. Actigraphy is established science. More to the point, it does seem to work. Sleep mode turns itself off automatically after it detects a certain number of steps.

You set and activate Smart Alarms using the iOS app. Unlike typical alarms that wake you at a discrete time that you select, Up wakes you up anytime within a 30 minute range. Therefore, it's important to set the Smart alarm for the last possible moment that you must be awake. In practice, it does seem to work. However, the first time I used it was shortly after we launched The Verge. Up started vibrating at the earliest possible time within the 30 minute range. With full clarity of mind I was able to calculate that I was robbed of an extra half hour of sleep. So, with great lucidity and intent, I stripped Up off of my wrist and allowed my backup alarm to rouse me later. I certainly prefer being awoken by a gentle vibration instead of the piezoelectric blast of audio released by traditional alarms. However, the idea of waking up even a minute sooner than my allotted sleep quota is too great a mental hurdle to overcome.

meal tracking

Up's food journal is by far the weakest part of the overall experience. At the moment, all you can do is photograph your food for reference on a timeline. After an hour or so, you'll receive a push notification asking you to pick an appropriate facial expression icon that best describes how the meal made you feel. Jawbone says you can use your responses to help discover which foods make you feel the best. Really, that's just marketing spin for an

underdeveloped feature. Fitbit, for example, allows you to match your meals to a large database of predefined generic and branded foods with their calorie counts already inserted. The Fitbit site then lets you know how your caloric intake balances with your activity allowing you to adjust your activity to match your weight loss or fitness goals. It's still an approximation and requires a lot of manual input but it far surpasses Jawbone's feeble attempt at managing your eating habits.

In an ideal world, using the Up app to photograph your food's label would recognize it, Google-Goggles style, and automatically assign the caloric data to the meal. Someday, maybe.

The more team members you have the more effective it is, I guess

