

# Considerations for Smartphone Acquisition

## Overview

This document was prepared based on the personal experience of the Computer Club president and was validated by other Computer Club members. Its initiation resulted from some adverse surprises during ownership of a smartphone. It is not meant to be a complete list of all things a smartphone buyer or user should consider, nor will an attempt be made to keep it current; however, if readers of this document have suggestions that would be beneficial to others, please send those suggestions via email to [wvcomputerclub@gmail.com](mailto:wvcomputerclub@gmail.com).

## Buying a new smartphone

The following information outlines areas and contains suggestions that may not be obvious to a smartphone buyer but should be considered so adverse surprises are not encountered after the purchase. Note that the smartphone market and technology are constantly changing, so an issue this week may not be an issue next week, and vice versa.

## Determine Critical Needs along with Wants and Desires

First suggestion: **Make lists of the critical, essential and desirable features and functions you want on your phone.** Different users have different needs for apps (programs) such as emergency communications, video calls (Skype, ooVoo, Facetime, etc.), digital assistants (Siri, Cortana, Google), sending outgoing text messages by voice, reading incoming text messages by voice, automatically dialing phone numbers by voice commands, setting alarms and reminders, GPS, calendar, syncing with other devices, still and video camera, notifications and warnings, games, magnifier, flashlight, fitness monitor, browsers, news, file readers for website content and email attachments, shopping tools, calculator, word processor, spreadsheet software, radio and TV stations, music, voice recorder, voicemail, wallet, caller ID, call forwarding, call or caller blocking, and app store.

## Talk with smartphone owners

Second suggestion: **Talk with trusted friends and family members who own a smartphone and discuss what they like and don't like about their smartphone. Why did they buy it? Did they consider the items listed above? Do they recommend other items? Would they recommend their phone or another phone for your needs?**

## Identify suppliers that will meet your needs

Third suggestion: **Shop around for the best deal and the best answers.** Sometimes companies such as Costco offer deals with better warranties, better pricing or price matching, two-for-the-price-of-one, better data plans, more desired features, training or support, or faster delivery. Be prepared to get answers to the questions and issues listed below. Note that hardware (phone model) and phone service providers (AT&T, Verizon, etc.) offer different options.

## Storage Capacity

Fourth suggestion: **Find out how much storage capacity and supplemental storage capacity the phone has and can it be expanded, and to what maximum. How difficult is it to move files to supplemental storage or to an external device?** If you take a lot of pictures or videos,

you could exceed the device's storage capacity. If you activate a lot of apps, you could exceed storage capacity. Will the phone handle the apps you want?

### Battery Capacity

When I started looking for a new phone, I tried to use the same criteria I use when I look for a new computer: I wanted a device with maximum storage capacity and processing speed that would allow me to keep my device reasonably current for many years (more than two). The error in that thinking is that the battery in a smartphone has a limited life, and batteries in the latest thin smartphones are not easily replaced. And if they can be replaced, it can be expensive. This leads to the fifth suggestion in buying a smartphone: **Get information on the expected battery life, whether it can be replaced, how much replacement will cost and what warranty comes with the battery.**

### Battery repair experience

When the battery on my phone was losing its ability to maintain a full charge at about the two year anniversary of my ownership, I began searching for local battery replacement companies including the store where I bought my phone, Batteries Plus Bulbs, and other local sites displayed from my online search. I limited my search to local stores because I did not want to be without my phone for more than an hour or so while it was being repaired. The Interstate Batteries franchise on Oregon Pike (phone 717-824-4336) was willing to order the battery (none of the stores I contacted carried the battery in stock), charge it to make sure it worked, and call me when the replacement battery was ready to be installed. I would not share their name and phone number if I was not satisfied with their service, and a local coffee shop was nearby at which I caught up on some work while I was waiting for my phone to be repaired.

### Insurance plan

The next issue I discovered too late was related to the insurance plan on the phone: what would happen if the phone stopped performing well, was stolen or was damaged? What I found in my situation was that the deductible would almost cover the cost of an acceptable replacement phone; the replacement phones they offered under the insurance plan were far less capable than the phone I purchased; and apps had to be located in the app store, loaded and updated. Sixth suggestion: **Seriously evaluate the benefits offered by insurance plans.** If you are concerned about damaging or losing the phone, get a lower-end phone that meets your basic needs and that you are prepared to accept as an "upgrade" offer that some phone companies offer after two years. Seventh suggestion: **Get the seller or phone service carrier's "upgrade" offer in writing so you will not be surprised when your phone will no longer work with current applications. What are the procedures and turnaround guarantees if your phone needs repair?**

### Battery consumption, Internet Connection and Data Usage

Eighth suggestion: **When you know what apps you want, find out how much battery power those apps consume and whether they need an Internet connection to function.** Note that some apps run independently on the phone whereas others need to be connected to the Internet or cell phone towers. If you primarily use your phone in locations with strong Wi-Fi signals, data usage (i.e., connection to a telephone service carrier's tower) becomes less

significant; however, if you use your phone for other than phone calls and messaging outside Wi-Fi areas, the data plan you sign up for becomes significant (and can be expensive).

### Syncing with other devices

Ninth suggestion: **If you want to sync your phone with other devices, get assurance the capability exists.** Some phone users like to sync their calendars, contact lists, and applications with other devices. Don't wait until you get home to find you can't do it.

### Satisfaction Guarantee

Tenth suggestion: **Get in writing how long you can use the phone to evaluate its use in your personal environment and return the phone without penalty if it does not perform satisfactorily.** Some phone company cell tower signals are too weak or their coverage area is too limited to provide acceptable service. If you can't use your phone in areas where you need it, why buy it?

### Bottom line

**Attention to these details as you consider your purchase will be helpful both short-term and long-term.**