

Who needs a laptop?

The latest mobile phones aren't just phones. They're compact computers.

When I bought my T68i last year, it was the hottest thing in town. WAP, GPRS, MMS, Bluetooth, GSM, Triband, FAQ, RTFM. I couldn't go wrong, could I?

Now there's a new generation of phones that are even brainier (they're now giving away my T68i with packs of cornflakes), and they promise to be easy to use and better connected than Geoffrey Robinson.

The biggest appeal of "smart" phones is that you can have all your contacts (and all their details such as address, e-mail etc.) to hand even when you're out of the office. And because you can back up the contacts (and your diary, tasks, notes etc.) to your PC, it's not the end of the world if you lose it.

Of course they can do an awful lot more, like surf the web, take pics and receive e-mails remotely. You can even edit Office documents on some. So which one to choose?

Nokia's latest model, the 6600, actually looks like a phone (unlike some of its funkier predecessors) but sports all the features of a full-blown "smart" phone. It has a built-in camera, which also takes low-resolution video clips, and a large, colour screen. It runs Java, which means you can download games and other applications and run them on the phone.

Diary, address book and task list software is built-in and links to your PC. The 6600 doesn't have a keyboard or a touch-sensitive screen, however, so your thumbs have to do the talking on the number keys if you want to enter text. This means the 6600, while very well-equipped and well-connected, remains just a phone. At around £270 without a contract and from £130 with one (from O2) it's pricey, too.

The BlackBerry 7230 looks less like a phone than a tiny computer. Fitting neatly into your palm, it has a tiny keyboard. But the resemblance to other handheld computers is superficial.



Orange Treo 600

Likes

- ✓ Looks and feels great
- ✓ Palm operating system means lots of software
- ✓ Very easy to use

Dislikes

- ✗ Heavier than a regular mobile phone
 - ✗ Expensive data charges. No flat rate
 - ✗ Only available from Orange
 - ✗ No support for Bluetooth
- www.orange.co.uk



T-Mobile BlackBerry 6230

Likes

- ✓ Always on
- ✓ Flat rate data charge so no surprises
- ✓ Light but a bit plasticky

Dislikes

- ✗ Instant mobile e-mail is dangerously addictive
 - ✗ Address book, to-do list and calendar all feel dated and unwieldy
 - ✗ Daft, clunky holster
- www.T-mobile.co.uk



Nokia 6600

Likes

- ✓ It's packed with features
- ✓ Bluetooth makes it easy to hook up handhelds and wireless headsets
- ✓ Looks good

Dislikes

- ✗ No keyboard
 - ✗ Inserting a multimedia card, to store pictures or backups is fiddly
 - ✗ Little third-party software
- www.nokia.com

Think of the BlackBerry as an e-mail appliance. It is always on, like a mobile phone, and rings or buzzes when new mails comes in.

Unlike earlier BlackBerries, the 7230 doesn't need a big server in the office, and works with pretty much any e-mail system. It does function as a phone and has a diary, to-do list and address book that synchronise with your PC, but its forte is e-mail. T-Mobile sells them from £99 (with a contract) and the fast GPRS instant e-mail connection is just £10 a month no matter how many e-mails you get. There are different phone line rental packages, too.

The best of the current generation of smart phones is the Treo 600 from Orange. Like the BlackBerry it has a colour screen and a baby keyboard but

it feels like it was built on a Mercedes production line, and it works so much better, too. The screen is bigger, brighter and it's touch-sensitive so it's easier to control what's going on. As it's compatible with Palm software you can run all kinds of applications, including a Microsoft-compatible word processor and spreadsheet. It does e-mail, web browsing (not just WAP but the real worldwide web) and it has a built-in camera. The manual too, is exemplary, and the phone came preconfigured so it took no time at all to set up.

For under £120, with a contract, you get a great phone and a good handheld computer for your money.

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