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STATE OF THE ART

For iPhone, the ‘New’ Is Relative

By [DAVID POGUE](#)

One year and 11 days ago, our nation was swept by iPhone Mania. TV news coverage was relentless. Hard-core fans camped out to be the first in line. Bloggers referred to [Apple](#)’s new product as the “Jesus phone.”

It was a stunning black slab of glass: a cellphone, a brilliant music and video player and the best pocket Internet terminal the world had ever seen. The huge, bright, touch-sensitive screen made it addictive fun to rotate, page through or magnify your photos, videos and Web pages.

Today, the iPhone is in the hands of six million people. Clumsy touch-screen lookalikes from rival phone makers line the shelves.

And Friday is the iPhone’s second coming.

This time, though, when the iPhone 3G goes on sale in [AT&T](#) and Apple stores, iPhone Mania will be considerably more muted. That’s partly because the mystery is gone, partly because the AT&T service costs more and partly because there aren’t many new features in what Apple is calling the iPhone 3G.

The new name hints at the biggest change: this iPhone can bring you the Internet much faster. It can exploit AT&T’s third-generation (3G) cellular network, which brings you Web pages in less than half the time as the old iPhone.

As a handy bonus, 3G means that you can talk on the iPhone and surf the Internet simultaneously, which you couldn’t do before.

There is, however, a catch: you don’t get that speed or those features unless you’re in one of AT&T’s 3G network areas — and there aren’t many of them. The 3G coverage map at wireless.att.com/coverageviewer (zoom in and turn on “View 3G/Mobile Broadband Coverage” below the map) reveals that in 16 states, only three cities or fewer are covered; 10 states have no coverage at all. (Tip: Whenever you’re outside of a 3G area, turning off the iPhone’s 3G feature doubles the battery’s talk time, to 10 hours from 5.)

AT&T hastens to note that its 3G coverage will expand, and also that it will get even faster over time. (3G is a much bigger deal in the 70 other countries where the iPhone will soon be available because 3G is much more common.)

The other drastic change is the iPhone’s price: \$200 for the 8-gigabyte model, \$300 for the 16-gig. Those are terrific prices for a machine with so much sophistication, utility and power; a year ago, an 8-gig iPhone

would have cost you \$600.

But the iPhone 3G is not really, as Apple's Web site puts it, "half the price." The basic AT&T plan — unlimited Internet and 450 minutes of calling — now costs \$70 a month instead of \$60 (plus taxes and fees), and comes with no text messages instead of 200. (Adding text messaging costs at least \$5 a month more.)

True, iPhone 3G service now matches the plans for AT&T's other 3G phones; still, by the end of your two-year contract, the iPhone 3G will have cost you more than the old iPhone, not less.

The third improvement is audio quality, which has taken a gigantic step forward. You sound crystal clear to your callers, and they sound crystal clear to you. In fact, few cellphones sound this good.

The other improvements are smaller, but welcome. For example, the new iPhone feels even better in your hand, thanks to a gracefully curved, shiny plastic back. It also has a standard headphone jack — hallelujah! — so no clunky adapter is required for your favorite non-Apple headphones. The power adapter has been shrunk down to a one-inch cube, so it doesn't hog an extra spot on your power strip.

The new iPhone has true G.P.S. now, too, in addition to the fake G.P.S. of its predecessor — an ingenious system that shows your location on a map by analyzing nearby cellphone towers and Wi-Fi hot spots.

Unfortunately, there's not much you can do with the G.P.S. According to Apple, the iPhone's G.P.S. antenna is much too small to emulate the turn-by-turn navigation of a G.P.S. unit for a vehicle, for example.

Instead, all it can do at this point is track your position as you drive along, representing you as a blue dot sliding along the roads of the map. Even then, the metal of a car or the buildings of Manhattan are often enough to block the iPhone's view of the sky, leaving it just as confused as you are.

There are lots of small software improvements. The four-function calculator now turns into a scientific calculator when you rotate the phone 90 degrees. There's an address book search box, parental controls and instant language switching. (That feature is made possible by the on-screen keyboard, with keys that change to reflect the language you've selected. "That's really hard to do on your BlackBerry," says an Apple rep.)

And speaking of the BlackBerry crowd: Apple also says that the iPhone works better with corporate systems, like [Microsoft](#) Exchange and ActiveSync.

Note, though, that these software tweaks aren't iPhone 3G features. They're part of the free software upgrade called iPhone 2.0, which will be available to the six million original iPhones, starting Friday. For \$10, even [iPod](#) Touch owners can get this upgrade.

Unfortunately, most of the standard cellphone features that were missing from the first iPhone are still missing. There's still no voice dialing, video recording, copy-and-paste, memory-card slot, Bluetooth stereo audio or phone-to-phone photo sending (MMS). And when the battery needs replacement after a couple of years, you'll still have to pay Apple \$86 for a replacement.

Plenty of Appleholics have expressed dismay at how little the handset has changed. They'd gotten their

hopes up for the second-generation iPhone: video phone calls! iPhone Nano! 3G hovercraft!

But there is one towering tsunami of a feature that may well shut them up.

It's the iPhone App Store: a central, complete, drop-dead simple online catalog of new programs for the iPhone. Hundreds will be available when the store opens Friday, with thousands to follow. You browse, download and install new programs directly on the iPhone; they don't have to be transferred from a computer, and you don't have to hack the phone to use them. Most of the programs will be free or cheap.

Apple has demonstrated 16 of these programs, including an instant message program, an [eBay](#) auction tracker, medical references and a touch-sensitive musical keyboard; the best of them exploit the iPhone's orientation sensor, wireless technologies and other high-tech components.

One coming program, called iCall, will give you free phone calls when you're in a Wi-Fi hot spot. Another, called G-Park, exploits G.P.S. to help you find where you parked. Yet another, Urbanspoon, is "a cross between a magic eight ball and a slot machine:" you shake the phone, and it randomly displays the name of a good restaurant nearby, using the iPhone's G.P.S. and motion sensor.

You can also expect to see a time and expense tracker, home-automation remote control, voice recorder, Etch-a-Sketch, a recipe box, tip calculator, currency converter, e-book reader and so on.

Above all, the iPhone is about to become a dazzling hand-held game machine. The games revealed so far feature smooth 3-D graphics and tilt control; in one driving simulator, you turn the iPhone itself like a steering wheel, and your 3-D car on the screen banks accordingly. Other games exploit the multitouch screen, so you and a buddy can sit at opposite ends of the screen and fire at each other.

In short, the iPhone is about to become much more than a phone. And here's the best part: the App Store is also available to the original iPhones and the iPod Touch.

So the iPhone 3G is a nice upgrade. It more than keeps pace with advancing technology, and new buyers will generally be delighted.

But it's not so much better that it turns all those original iPhones into has-beens. Indeed, the really big deal is the iPhone 2.0 software and the App Store, neither of which requires buying a new iPhone. That twist may come as a refreshing surprise to planned-obsolescence conspiracy theorists — and everyone who stood in line last year.

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