

# Hands-On With the Helio Ocean

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Helio makes me glad. I've been waiting quite a while to say that, as I've felt for ages that the social-networking-focused wireless carrier was waiting for a phone that could really change the way people communicate. After half an hour with the Helio Ocean yesterday, I'm pretty convinced the Ocean is that phone.

The Ocean is basically a Sidekick 5. Take the Sidekick 3; think of what the Sidekick 4 would be; then add another generation.

Helio's been plugging its "dual-sliding" capability, where it slides in one direction to feel like a regular voice phone with a numeric keypad, and in another direction to reveal a full keyboard of small, but well spaced little nubbins.

But in my mind, the big deal here is the messaging software. The Ocean integrates everything on one screen, and lets you log into everything simultaneously: AIM, Yahoo! Messenger, Windows Live Messenger, text messaging, MMS, POP3 email, Microsoft Exchange, GMail, you name it. It only falls short of my two favorite e-mail solutions, Blackberry and Chatteremail, by refusing to integrate all the messages into one inbox. But it leaps ahead by integrating IM presence information into your contact book: click on any one of your contacts, and you'll see if they're logged in on AIM, Yahoo!, or whatever.

The Web browser isn't bad, either. It has an interesting zoom feature that dynamically resizes things while you watch, a picture-downloading feature that lets you grab images off of Web pages to use in your phone, and support for real, honest-to-goodness, ordinary Web sites.

Then there's Helio Up, the built-in blogging platform. I've seen integrated photoblogging on other phones, typically from Nokia and Sony Ericsson, but US carriers tend to perversely erase the blogging software before they release the phones over here.

Helio's a niche player. They aren't going to suddenly grab five million users from the major wireless carriers. But if you're a messaging focused person who isn't on a family plan and doesn't mind Sprint's coverage, you should probably be making some motion towards the Ocean when it comes out later this spring. A formal review is forthcoming, of course.

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