

Skype on the iPhone: Worth the download

April 8 2009, By Scott Kleinberg



When I first heard about Skype coming out on the iPhone, A LOT of stuff went through my mind:

- Will it work?
- Will it cost too much?
- Will I know anyone on [Skype](#) to use it with?
- Does it even matter if the [iPhone](#) has no video?
- Will the icon look good?

That last one aside, Skype passes my tests -- and OK, the icon isn't

terrible.

But actually I learned a lot about Skype too.

- It does work.
- It doesn't cost too much
- I know two other people and I can use it with people who don't have it.
- Video is nice but not essential

At the end of the day, this is what Skype means to me. It's a way to communicate with people without using cell service from AT&T.

I blast AT&T a lot -- I didn't use to -- but I do simply because I waited and waited and waited for the company to get its act together where 3G coverage is concerned. I live in a place where I don't believe I should have to worry about coverage. I'm bothered when anyone writes me and tells me of their connection and signal woes and believe me, I understand, because when I'm in the middle of downtown Chicago and I can't make a phone call, you are talking to Mr. Frustrated.

Not 2 minutes ago in the middle of writing this, I heard from a friend and colleague who tells me that his first gen iPhone is working better than ever -- battery life, signal, etc. And I told him that the likely reason is that AT&T completed a tower upgrade that's causing his iPhone to not have to work as hard in acquiring a signal.

That's a success story. And if you believe all the rumors that have been flying about how AT&T is planning this massive upgrade to their network ahead of the next iPhone launch (I want to believe it, but heard that between iPhone first gen and iPhone 3G too) then things are going

to get better.

And that's great. But for now, we have Skype.

For those who are unaware, Skype is a voIP client, or voice over IP. It means you are making your call over Wi-Fi and not over the cellular network. So, in my case, I can sit in my apartment with my wireless network going and my cell signal showing its normal "searching..." and still make a crystal clear(asterisk) call.

That's huge. And if the person I'm talking to also uses Skype, it doesn't cost me anything.

(asterisk)Now for the asterisk. The call quality is good. It's not great. But it's good. There's no crackling as you know it from a cell call. There's quite a bit of echoing where it sounds like you are inside a tin can. And sometimes you lose every other word the other person is saying. But as bad as that sounds, it's still different than having someone breaking up on a cell call. It's more tolerable and more manageable, except in this case walking around the room trying to find a better spot has no impact. In my experience, the quality improved on its own and wasn't enough to make me throw my iPhone across the room (which I'd never do, despite my frustration).

But here's the thing you may not know. You can purchase Skype credits and dial any landline phone, anywhere in the world via Skype. So you can call your grandmother and when she picks up her rotary dial phone, there's you just as if you were talking to her on a traditional telephone. That part is very cool (the rotary dial phone and the fact that Skype is a traditional telephone just as much as it is a [video chat](#) client).

Using Skype on a computer is amazing. You have that video chat capability. I tried that with my sister and my dad from separate locations.

My sister's audio wasn't working so I had to talk to her on the cell phone for audio. She's working on that. My dad's experiment was perfect. With a little bit of that aforementioned cutting out, it was a pleasant Skype experience.

When you purchase Skype credits, you need to use them at least once in 180 days (6 months) so they don't expire. Easy enough, it would seem. And it doesn't cost that much. And you can use the credits to also text message people although that costs extra (usually about 9 cents each) and I think AT&T's texting is more than adequate where you don't need Skype for SMS.

Now one other thing that's important to mention about Skype. The company is clear that Skype is not for emergency calling. You cannot call 911 on it. So whether or not you decide to forego a landline phone is really up to you but you can't use it in an emergency. Yes, you can call 911 on a cell phone. I personally believe that the true best 911 is via a landline phone because it's guaranteed to be local and almost always works. I say almost always because I know there are outages. But the bottom line is that you can't rely on Skype in an emergency.

Looking ahead, I'm convinced that the next iPhone will have video capture capabilities. Now whether or not that means actual streaming of video, well, that's up for debate however I think it's coming sooner rather than later. And when that day comes, Skype will be ready to provide a desktop/laptop like experience on the iPhone -- which will be amazing in so many ways. I've always thought that the iPhone should have video and I know that a mobile video chat using an iPhone will be the next popular thing that everyone does and has to do. I always thought that Apple would release a mobile version of iChat that would blow everyone out of the water. They still might, but for now, Skype has what it needs to provide great voIP service now and down the road.

It's free to download and play around with, so I recommend you do that. And for the best experience, try to download it also on your computer and see the other settings. You might appreciate it more that way.

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