

# Palm Pre: It's almost an iPhone

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The new Palm Pre from Sprint is the best attempt yet to create a phone that is as powerful, elegant and simple to use as the Apple iPhone.

Like the [iPhone](#), it's got a full Web browser; multitouch controls (pinching, flicking, etc.); Wi-Fi; a gorgeous video screen; and the ability to view PDF, Microsoft Word documents and other files.

It costs \$200 with a two-year contract and after a rebate. Sprint's rate plans start at \$70 a month.

By far, the Pre's best feature is its system of "activity cards," which let you quickly jump back and forth among Web pages, applications and other functions without having to close any of them. Every time you want to do something, such as visit a Web page, take a picture, send an e-mail or listen to a song, a new card opens.

Then, when you press the center button, you get a view of all the active cards, and you move between them by swiping your finger to the left or the right. When you want to open one, you just tap on it. When you want to close one, you swipe it off the screen with a satisfying upward flick of your finger.

Say you start watching a YouTube video when you suddenly realize you have to send an important e-mail. To do this on an iPhone, you'd have to exit YouTube, open the e-mail program, type your e-mail, exit the e-mail program, open YouTube again and navigate to the spot in the video where you left off.

But since the Pre lets you have multiple programs running at the same time, all you have to do is minimize YouTube, maximize your e-mail, send your message and then jump right back to your YouTube video. It's the closest a mobile phone has come to replicating the jumping back and forth among programs that many of us do on our computers all day long. There's also an easy way to swipe your finger to return to the previous screen.

Another key feature is the way the Pre merges contacts and calendars from multiple sources, including Microsoft Outlook, Facebook, [Google](#) and other services.

So, if someone is in your Outlook address book and is a Facebook friend, you will see one entry for the name with the contact information from both places. Similarly, events you've RSVP'd to on Facebook, meetings you've scheduled through Outlook and events you've added to your Google calendar are all displayed together.

One drawback: Because the cards are always active and the phone is constantly being updated from the Internet, even when in sleep mode, the battery wears out quick, after a couple of hours of moderate use. Like an iPhone, battery life improves when you do things such as reduce the frequency that the phone checks for new e-mails. Unlike the iPhone, the Pre has a removable battery, so you can purchase an extra one.

The phone has a stylish, pebble-like design that comfortably fits in your hand and a slide-out keyboard. Having a real keyboard is nice, but I found it to be kind of cramped, and I sometimes got pains in my wrists after typing on it for a long time. It's nowhere near as comfortable as a BlackBerry keyboard. With its 3-megapixel flash camera, MP3 player, video player and [YouTube](#) application, the Pre performs nicely as a multimedia device. You can even sync the phone with Apple's iTunes to transfer music, videos and photos. However, the phone only holds 8 GB

of music, videos and other items.

There are some puzzling omissions, such as visual voicemail, something the iPhone and another Sprint phone, the Samsung Instinct, both have. You also can't record video, an included feature of the iPhone 3G S, which comes out Friday.

Like the iPhone and the T-Mobile G1, the Pre has an application store to download programs without connecting to a computer. Unfortunately, there's barely anything in the Pre's app store, so it's hard to judge what's out there. But I expect the number of applications to increase.

So is the Pre better than the iPhone? I still prefer the iPhone, mainly because it has a bigger screen. I also like the virtual keyboard and its huge lead in apps (more than 35,000).

I do wish the iPhone would let you switch back and forth among applications like the Pre. I don't foresee a lot of people switching to Sprint to get the Pre, but for Sprint (and in the future, Verizon) customers and Palm fans, the Pre is a phone that will cure your iPhone envy.

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