

Review: Motorola's Cliq is a snappy smart phone

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The Motorola Cliq is shown in San Francisco, Tuesday Oct. 20, 2009. (AP Photo/Russel A. Daniels)

(AP) -- Imagine how you'd feel if you peaked in middle school. That's pretty much what happened to cell phone maker Motorola Inc., which had a megahit in 2005 with its Razr handset but has since failed to fashion another that can approach its popularity.

Now that the rest of the cell phone market has matured and feature-packed "smart" phones are becoming the choice of many consumers, Motorola hopes to entice people with the Cliq, its first phone that uses Google's Android software. T-Mobile began selling the Cliq (\$200 with a two-year contract) to existing customers on Monday, and it will be available to all comers starting Nov. 2.

The twist in the Cliq is that it combines [social-networking](#) features with slick hardware. The Cliq won't eclipse Apple's iPhone, but it shows Motorola is serious about carving a new niche in a fiercely competitive market.

The Cliq looks sharp but not too original on the surface: Its front is dominated by a brilliant 3.1-inch touch screen and a few navigation buttons, while a spacious full-sized keyboard with a multidirectional controller slides out from the side. A standard [headphone jack](#) sits on the top.

Turn the Cliq on, however, and it's quite the social butterfly. A little application "widget" on the home screen dubbed "Happenings" constantly refreshes your friends' latest updates to Facebook, Twitter and other social sites. Another widget aggregates all the messages you get from various social networks and [e-mail](#) accounts and gives a preview of the latest one. A third widget shows your most recent status update and lets you easily update one or several social networks at a time.

The Cliq's never-ending deluge of data about your clique comes courtesy of Motorola's new Motoblur software, which gathers information from your various social Web and e-mail accounts. All you have to do is set up your accounts - there's a list to choose from - and pick which one the Cliq should primarily pull photos from, so it can integrate your friends' photos with their messages and updates.

The Cliq takes all this data aggregation beyond the home screen, too, creating an ambitious yet somewhat messy master contact list that includes your friends' contact info and vital stats such as their birthdays.

This contact conglomeration is both cool and cumbersome - sort of like a less-elegant version of what Palm did with its Pre smart phone. Pulling up my friend Rich's contact on the Cliq yielded his Facebook profile

photo, his latest Facebook status update, his cell number and his birthday. When I called him, the Cliq showed me his photo and status.

When I wanted to call my friend Lydia, though, I had to sort through three different contacts before finding the one that had her [cell phone](#) number in it. That's because the phone had given her several different listings that related to different social networks. You can link such contacts, as I did for a few people. I would never take the time required to sort through everyone and link them all properly, though.

If you get sick of having all this information in your face, there is an option to filter your contact list so the Cliq shows just your Facebook friends or the contacts whose numbers you have stored on your phone's SIM card.

Beyond all its social bells and whistles, a 5-megapixel camera also helps the Cliq stand out. It can take sharper photos than most of its contemporaries - including the two other Android-based phones T-Mobile currently sells and Apple Inc.'s [iPhone](#). Those cameras hover around 3 megapixels.

The handset includes a 2-gigabyte microSD card, which means there's plenty of room to store photos and videos you take.

Of course, the Cliq also makes phone calls. Some conversations sounded a bit muffled, but overall it worked fairly well.

Sadly, my fun with the Cliq was often cut short, as its battery lasts about as long as a trending topic on Twitter. Usually, I barely got a full day's worth of charge out of it, even when I wasn't watching any videos, listening to tunes or opening the Web browser. I started to wonder if this was because of all the [widgets](#) I had running on the phone - I used five of them, including two that fed me the latest news and entertainment info.

There were other problems, too. Not infrequently, the phone would freeze and give me an apologetic error message, telling me that an application was not responding and that I could wait or force it to close. Despite its desire to bring me the latest "Happenings," that widget in particular seemed to experience performance anxiety, stuttering or failing to give me the next status update when I swiped my finger across the screen.

Despite these hiccups, I really did like the Cliq. It probably won't be nearly as popular as the Razr once was, but it might help Motorola snag a seat at the table with the cool smart phones.

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