

With Droid Incredible, Google-based phones take next step

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The HTC Droid Incredible

Google and its smart phone partners have been on quite a roll lately.

Last fall, Motorola introduced the Droid, the first hit phone based on Google's [Android](#) operating system. Droid not only was the best Android phone, but it also was the best smart phone on the market at the time other than Apple's [iPhone](#).

In January, Google and Taiwan-based manufacturer HTC topped the Droid with Google's [Nexus One](#). Although sales of the Nexus One have

been disappointing, the device took Android to the next level with its sleek physical design, refined three-dimensional interface and speedy processor.

Now, with the new HTC Droid Incredible, Google and HTC have raised the bar once more.

The Droid Incredible shares a lot in common with its sister phone, the Nexus One. It's got the same snappy 1-gigahertz processor and the same bright 3.7-inch [OLED screen](#). And like the Nexus One, it runs Android 2.1, which is the latest version of Google's operating system.

But the Droid Incredible offers some significant improvements over the Nexus One. The first thing users will notice is that the Incredible comes with HTC's Sense interface. Sense is a program that runs on top of Android and helps organize the phone's home screens.

Users see a big clock when they turn on and unlock their phones and icons of commonly used programs. Double-tapping the Incredible's home button allows you to see thumbnail views of each of the phone's seven home screens.

Instead of having to swipe across the screen multiple times to get to the page you want, you can simply tap on its thumbnail and go to it directly.

Sense also lets you customize your home screens with scenes that correspond to particular uses or times of the day. So there's a "work" scene that includes links to your e-mail box and calendar and stock chart widgets. And there's a "play" scene that includes a Twitter widget and a link to your phone's picture gallery. The feature also lets you create your own personalized scenes with particular [widgets](#) and program icons. To switch among the scenes, you just change a setting on the home page.

But the Incredible has more going for it than just the latest version of Sense. It also has an 8-megapixel camera -- compared with a 5-megapixel one on the Nexus One -- which gives the Incredible one of the highest-resolution cameras for a smart phone.

Like the camera on Apple's iPhone 3GS, the Incredible's camera allows you to focus on particular areas in a scene by touching on the area you want in full focus. You can also shoot video. The Incredible's camera, unlike the iPhone's, includes a zoom feature and dual LED flashes for taking shots in low light.

I found the pictures to be sharp and bright, some of the best I've seen taken with a smart phone camera.

Another nice upgrade is in storage. Unlike the Nexus One, which comes with a scant 512 megabytes of onboard storage space, the Incredible comes with a respectable 8 gigabytes.

You can expand storage on both phones by plugging in a micro SD card into their storage slots. But 8 gigabytes should be more than enough room to store your Android applications and a decent number of songs or movies.

Perhaps most important, the Incredible runs on Verizon, the nation's biggest network in terms of users. Verizon also tends to have better coverage than either T-Mobile or AT&T, the carriers that support the Nexus One.

In addition to these upgrades, the Incredible includes most of the latest Android features found in the Google phone. It has Google's free turn-by-turn navigation program, an address book that integrates contact data from Microsoft Exchange mail servers, Facebook and other sources, and an online backup service.

That said, the Incredible has shortcomings. I found its rectangular shape and multilevel back more awkward and less comfortable to hold than the Nexus One or my iPhone.

Worse, Verizon says that you should get more than five hours of talk time out of it, which is two hours less than [Google](#) says you can get out of the Nexus One. I didn't test it on this point, but I frequently found that even after moderate or little hands-on use -- albeit with mail sync turned on -- the Incredible's battery was dead at the end of the day.

While the number of Android applications has been growing quickly, it's still a fraction of the 200,000 now available for the iPhone. Yes, you'll find some of the more popular iPhone applications on Android, including Facebook and Pandora. But you'll find a greater diversity of applications for the iPhone, and games in particular remain a huge advantage for Apple's device.

And while Verizon has very good coverage, its network has one notable flaw: It doesn't allow you to talk on the phone while you surf the Internet or, say, look up a restaurant review on Yelp. That can blunt the multi-tasking advantage that Android phones have over the iPhone.

All that said, the Droid Incredible is a very nice phone. If you are on Verizon or determined to get an Android phone, it's the best thing out there.

HTC DROID INCREDIBLE:

- Troy's rating: 4.2 (out of 5)
- Likes: Sense interface; high-resolution camera; snappy processor.
- Dislikes: Blocky design; number of games and applications lags far

behind those available for iPhone.

- How much: \$200 with two-year Verizon contract and \$100 online discount.

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