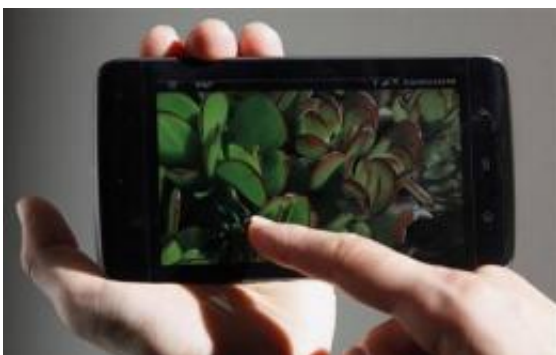


Review: Dell Streak is awkward phone, so-so tablet

August 25 2010, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer



In this Aug. 24, 2010 photo, an Associated Press reporter holds the Dell Streak phone during a product review in San Francisco. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

(AP) -- Lately I've been feeling very self-conscious when talking on the phone in public, and it's not because I'm worried about strangers listening in on my private conversations.

Rather, it's because the [cell phone](#) I'm using - the just-released Dell Streak - is actually a [touch-screen](#) tablet device that makes some of the clunkiest [handsets](#) from the late '90s look diminutive by comparison.

The Streak (\$300 with a two-year AT&T contract) is a complicated gadget. For a tablet computer, it is fairly small and thin - a fraction the size of Apple Inc.'s popular iPad. Its face is dominated by a touch screen that is 5 inches diagonally, compared with the iPad's 9.7-inch display.

Yet Dell insists it is also a phone, and as such it is fairly enormous and uncomfortable to talk on. Beyond that, it comes with an older version of Google Inc.'s Android software. Overall, it's just too awkward to bear.

The Streak's enormity is inescapable. It's a little less than 6 inches long and 3 inches across, so it looked mammoth in my petite hands. I felt like a little kid holding her father's smart phone.

It was clear from the start that carrying around the black gadget would be a chore. It fit into the back pockets of my jeans, but protruded noticeably. I was afraid it would fall out or be filched by some tablet-phone-hungry thief. As a result, I had to carry it in a bag or hold it in my hand if I wanted to tote it around, and this latter option quickly got old.

Still, I figured the Streak's size would be great for at least one thing: watching videos. As expected, videos streamed well from such sites as YouTube and Funny or Die, probably helped by the device's 1 GHz processor. Images looked sharp and bright on the screen. They didn't look quite as stellar as they do on Apple's latest iPhone or Samsung's new Galaxy S smart phones, though.

There is plenty of storage space on the Streak for the videos you want to watch (and for photos and songs, too), as it includes a 16-gigabyte microSD memory card. And the device's battery seemed to have no problem getting through a day filled with video and music streaming, Web surfing and chatting.

The screen was also a swell surface for checking out Google Maps and other websites. I liked having extra real estate to look up directions and see pages that contained both photos and text. But using it to instant message my friends was more difficult than on other touch-screen keyboards I've used; despite the Streak's size, I kept hitting the wrong keys.

Using the Streak to make phone calls was a new experience. I felt weird holding it up to my ear, imagining quizzical looks as I walked down the street. The Streak didn't sound bad, but it didn't sound great, either. Calls sounded kind of fuzzy on my end, and in one frustrating exchange the screen kept changing orientation while I was on the phone, which also meant that the physical button that allowed me to turn the sound up and down kept reversing functions.

Beyond the Streak's basic awkwardness, its biggest flaw is that it relies on old software. Despite the inclusion of a swift processor, the Streak is saddled with an older version of the Android operating software - version 1.6 - which means it is missing some of latest features and can't run some applications that call for newer operating software. It also lacks Adobe's Flash Player 10.1 for watching Flash videos.

[Dell](#) Inc. says the Streak will get what is currently the latest Android software, version 2.2, later this year and will get Flash 10.1, too. I'm stymied by decision to not even start out the Streak with version 2.1, which is available on a number of current smart phones.

Another odd handicap: Although the Streak has a low-resolution front-facing camera, which could be used for video chatting, it's only currently enabled for taking photos and videos. Video chat is expected to work when the device gets the Android software update, but for now it feels like quite a tease.

Fortunately, the Streak comes with fully functional 5-megapixel digital camera on its back. The camera takes sharp images and has a bright flash, and the display functions as perhaps the biggest viewfinder you've ever used. There are plenty of options for adjusting your shots, and I was able to take a bunch of crisp shots. You'll need to hold it steady while snapping, though, because the Streak takes a long time to take a photo after you've pressed its shutter button.

And you'll probably want to use headphones with the Streak, as the quality of its built-in speaker is dismal. When watching a Ted Leo And The Pharmacists music video online, the sound was muddled, even at a low volume. Because the speaker is located on the Streak's back, it gets even harder to hear when you set the gadget down.

Fresher software will surely improve the Streak, but whether you're looking for a phone, a tablet computer or both, the Streak falls short. Performance-wise, that is; in reality, it's anything but.

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