

# Motorola Atrix aspires to be more than smart phone

March 16 2011, By Troy Wolverton

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The Motorola Atrix

The new Motorola Atrix is a smart phone that aspires to be much more than that.

The Atrix can be thought of as one of the first examples of a post-PC

computer, offering many of the same advantages of a PC in a much smaller, more portable and more adaptable form.

When the Atrix is plugged into an optional dock that resembles a notebook computer, it can be used much like a laptop. Another dock can be connected to a computer monitor and keyboard to allow the Atrix to act like a desktop PC or can be connected to an HD television, allowing the device to act as a kind of digital set-top box. The accessories allow users to write e-mail, surf Web pages or even watch movies as they would on a standard computer.

To be sure, the Atrix is more than just a wannabe PC. It's also a fully capable smart phone based on Google's [Android](#) operating system. It's superfast at playing games and running typical phone apps, thanks to its dual-core processor, one of the first in a device this small. It has a high-resolution 4-inch screen, and includes a new, refined version of Motoblur, Motorola's software that links together contact information and status updates drawn from users' social networking and other online accounts.

But it's the Atrix's ability to mimic and potentially replace other tech gadgets that makes it so intriguing.

I'm writing this review at my desk. For part of the time, I've used the monitor and keyboard I use with my office-issued Windows PC. But I've also been using something that looks and feels very much like a notebook computer. In both cases, the actual "computer" I've been using has been the Atrix.

The notebook accessory for the Atrix, dubbed the laptop dock, has a full keyboard, a trackpad, an 11.5-inch LCD screen and its own battery that Motorola says will last for up to eight hours of use even while recharging the battery that's in the phone itself. The Atrix plugs into the accessory

through a dock that's hidden behind the accessory's screen.

When you plug in the phone, the screen on the laptop dock lights up and you get an interface called "webtop" that offers a computer desktop and taskbar. From the webtop taskbar, you can launch the Firefox Web browser or, through a virtual image of the Atrix's screen, any application you have installed on the device.

The other accessory - the HD Multimedia dock - is more versatile. If you attach it to a computer monitor via a digital video cable, you can use the Atrix as a kind of desktop computer. The dock has two USB ports into which you can plug a wired keyboard or mouse or an external hard or flash drive. You can also connect the Atrix to a wireless keyboard or mouse using Bluetooth.

Alternatively, you can plug the HD dock into your TV using an HDMI cable and use the Atrix as a media player. A built-in application called entertainment center allows users to quickly access and view on their television the pictures, songs and movies stored on the device. The HD dock includes a remote control that allows users to do all this from the comfort of their couch.

Unfortunately, the Atrix's versatility comes at a high price and doesn't work very well in practice.

The laptop dock alone is \$300 - not including the price of the phone or your wireless service plan - which is about what you'd pay for a low-end notebook computer with an actual brain in it. The HD dock, with a bundled keyboard, mouse and remote control, goes for \$190, or about twice what you'd pay for a Roku media player or Apple TV, both of which are able to do much more as digital living room devices.

Those prices might be worth paying if you could get years of use out of

the docks and plug into them not only the Atrix but other [smart phones](#). But right now, the docks are compatible only with the Atrix. Motorola won't say whether it plans to make devices in the future that will work with them. Even if the company does, it's a good bet that the docks will work only with Motorola gadgets, which means you'll have limited choices for compatible devices in the future.

That limitation aside, the laptop dock in particular was disappointing. Although it's wider and deeper than a typical netbook, its keys felt similarly cramped, leading to many typing errors. Meanwhile, I had to be wary of resting my palms on its touch pad - an easy thing to do - for fear of moving the cursor to a different part of a document and inserting or deleting words in the wrong place.

The webtop software was also underwhelming. It fails to translate the phone's native apps into a PC-like experience. To run a phone app, you have to call up the virtual phone and launch it there. The experience makes you feel as if you are viewing those apps through a literal window.

The only native webtop application is Firefox, and Motorola has no plans to open up the interface for other programs. You can run cloud-based programs through the Web browser or a built-in Citrix client, but you may not want to. Because as speedy as the Atrix's processor is for running phone apps, it labored noticeably while running webtop.

Even when just composing this review in [Google](#) docs, I noticed a considerable lag. While trying to highlight a word or line to delete or change, I'd often wait several beats before the Atrix would respond. Often times, I ended up highlighting or deleting far more than I wanted without knowing it. I ran into similar sluggishness while just surfing Web pages in Firefox.

I actually like the Atrix a lot as a smart phone. But as the first of what will likely be many attempts at an all-in-one gadget, it comes up short.

TROY'S RATING:

-7.5(Out of 10)

-What: Motorola Atrix 4G smart phone

-Likes: Speedy processor, high-resolution screen, versatility

-Dislikes: Accessories are expensive; laptop accessory has cramped keyboard and flaky touchpad; device slows noticeably when docked.

-Specs: Dual-core 1-gigahertz processor, 4-inch screen, 16-gigabytes storage, front-facing VGA camera and 5-megapixel rear-facing camera

-Price: \$200 with two-year contract with AT&T. Laptop dock is additional \$300. HD Multimedia dock is an extra \$190.

-Web: [motorola.com](http://motorola.com), [wireless.att.com](http://wireless.att.com)

**More information:** Troy Wolverton is a technology columnist for the San Jose Mercury News.

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