

Review: Why I bought an iPhone 4S

November 2 2011, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer



FILE - In this Oct. 14, 2011 file photo, people line up to purchase an Apple iPhone 4S at a Sprint store in San Francisco. The Associated Press reporter Rachel Metz explains why she chose the Apple iPhone 4S as her updated smartphone, in a column Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2011.(AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

(AP) -- I felt nervous and a little giddy sidling up to the counter at the Apple Store on the first day the new iPhone went on sale last month.

I'd just given the iPhone 4S a rave review, and I was going to buy one for myself. It was about to be my first iPhone and only my second smartphone.

I was a little freaked out.

I hadn't bought a cellphone since October 2008, when I got the first phone running Google's Android software, the G1, on its first day on

sale. Since then, I've reviewed scores of phones for The Associated Press, and I've given personal recommendations to friends and family.

When it came to opening my own wallet, though, it got a lot harder: There were so many great phones out there, but none that had it all. I'm sure I'm not the only person who's had trouble deciding.

I really liked the G1 at first and because it never died, I kept using it. But over the years, smartphones have moved [light years](#) ahead. I granted it a new lease on life in January by replacing its battery, but with sluggish performance, tired features and an inability to run many newer apps, I knew time was running out.

It wasn't just the phone. It was also the phone's service plan with T-Mobile.

I've been a loyal T-Mobile customer for years. I've stuck with it when my first apartment in New York lacked coverage and again when I moved to a San Francisco apartment where I have to practically stick my head out the window to get a signal. But that was getting tiring.

I wanted a hot, new phone and reliable service to go with it.

As a gadget reviewer, you'd think it would be easy for me to pick out a new [cellphone](#). I know what's out there, and I have access to the top devices. At any given time, I have a disturbing number of "loaner" smartphones crowding my desk, waiting to be reviewed or sent back to a handset maker or wireless carrier.

As it turns out, this made it even harder to make a decision. Part of me felt paralyzed by choice, while another part of me felt no existing phone had everything on my wish list of features. I also hesitated knowing that anything I bought would soon be replaced by a newer model.

On top of all that, I felt anxious about signing a new two-year service contract. I'd been going month to month with the G1 for almost a year. I was fearful that if I committed now, I'd miss out on a better phone over the next two years - one packed with more goodies from my wish list.

I wanted it all. I wanted design and ease of use like the iPhone, but with an operating system that's more flexible, like Android. I didn't want a physical keyboard, but I longed for a good on-screen keyboard. I wanted the ability to use third-party keyboard software like Swype for fast typing, something I couldn't do with an iPhone. I also desired an awesome touch screen and a built-in camera that could take the place of my trusty, yet older-model digital camera.

Also, it had to work well in my home and office.

When the iPhone 4 came out last June, it had much of what I wanted, but I wasn't completely swayed. I also held off because it was still only available with AT&T's network, so it would barely work in my apartment.

When the iPhone came to Verizon Wireless this February, I was more tempted by that network's reliability. But I figured I could hold out until June, when Apple typically announces a new iPhone. I figured a new iPhone would have an even better camera and processor and other features besides those. So I waited.

When it became clear a new iPhone wouldn't be coming until the fall, I waited some more.

By the summer, my G1 was looking sadder and sadder. After reviewing the excellent T-Mobile myTouch 4G Slide, I almost gave in and bought one for myself, but I didn't want a physical keyboard or two more years of being tied to my service provider.

Finally, the iPhone 4S was announced in October. I reviewed it and was impressed enough with the hardware and new software to brave the launch day crowds and get a white 16-gigabyte model that runs on Verizon Wireless' network. It cost me \$199 and will tie me up with the carrier for two years.

Now, several weeks later, I'm happy with my decision.

The iPhone 4S isn't perfect. I really wish, for example, that Apple would let outside developers offer keyboard apps for the device. Yet it's a fast, fantastic smartphone. Despite complaints from other users that they've been experiencing poor battery life, I haven't noticed any problems so far. And Verizon's service, while costlier than what I had with T-Mobile, is reliable for calls and transferring data.

One of my favorite parts of the device is Siri, the built-in "personal assistant" that responds to your voice in a soothing, robotic female tone. It can do everything from scheduling meetings to texting friends to telling you how many calories you'll burn if you bike 100 miles (4,455, assuming you're a 159-pound male).

Most impressive to me are the little things. For instance, if I ask her midday to set an alarm for 7 o'clock, Siri knows I mean 7 p.m. (she'd set it for 7 a.m. if I issued the same order in the evening). I've used voice-recognition software before, but never anything like this.

Weirdly, I often find myself saying "thank you" after Siri completes a task, almost as if she were a friend doing me a favor (her responses range from "that's nice of you to say" to "your wish is my command.")

I'm digging the organizational features, such as the Notification Center, which gives me a quick glance at missed calls, appointments, weather and more when I swipe down on the screen.

Also, the camera is great. At a recent Portishead concert, I was able to snap plenty of detailed shots very quickly, even in the low light of an outdoor evening show.

Not long after I switched, I got a tempting offer in the mail from T-Mobile. Come back to us, it pleaded, and we'll give you any smartphone for free.

For a moment, I imagined returning to T-Mobile's welcoming arms and snagging a new [Android smartphone](#). I'd pick an expensive one, naturally, as the letter said I could have any one I wanted. The iPhone's not for everyone, I reminded myself, and there are plenty of people who are happy with other handsets.

Then I remembered why I switched to Apple's gadget - and changed networks - in the first place.

Most people won't get their hands on as many phones as I have as a gadget reviewer, but chances are they share my desire for getting the best product at the best price.

For my money, the iPhone 4S gives me the right combination of brains, beauty and reliable service.

And so, I set the letter aside and got back to playing around with my new [iPhone](#).

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