

# Gift guide to the hottest smartphones and tablets

December 9 2011, By Matthew Fortner

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Choosing the right gadget can be hard, especially if you are unfamiliar with the mobile landscape. Many ask, "What's the best?" But priorities vary among users. You'll have to weigh those for yourself.

I've summarized my top picks for smartphones and tablets with some highlights that might make the difference.

- Apple iPhone 4S: Its gorgeous Retina display touchscreen is a gem mounted in stylish stainless steel band. Although just 3.5 inches, it can be easier to read than many of its larger competitors. The camera is one of the best in a phone. Battery life is good, but some users have complained of battery draining bugs. Its ease of use and unmatched ecosystem make it a great starter [smartphone](#), but it lacks the customization options that Android phones can offer. Specs are near the top, but don't break any ground. It's available on AT&T, Verizon and now Sprint.

- Samsung Galaxy Nexus S: Not even out yet, its one of the most anticipated Android phones of the quarter. It will run the latest version of Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich on a 4.65 inch curved glass display. There is not much to say until some hands on details emerge, but it does have promising specifications and has Google's direct software support for Android updates. Android phone is on the list keep an eye out.

- Samsung Galaxy S II: There is a lot that makes this one of the hottest smartphones on the market: a 1.2 GHz dual-core processor, 1 GB of

RAM, 4.27-inch AMOLED Plus [touchscreen](#), 16 GB of internal storage, 32 GB capable microSD card (included), Google Android Gingerbread 2.3.4, and a great 8 megapixel rear camera. There are variants among the big carriers. Full review.

- Motorola Droid RAZR: What makes this Droid so sharp? Kevlar and stainless steel construction, a 1.2GHz dual-core processor, 1 GB RAM, Verizon's 4G-LTE network, and a Super AMOLED 4.3 inch display. Automated Smart Actions triggered by a variety of rules including GPS, battery state, and others can perform magic. You might use GPS detect when you are at home or work to turn on Wi-Fi or adjust ringer volume. Your media player can be launched by connecting an audio cable. You could automate a text to be sent to certain contacts if you miss their call. Full review.

- Apple [iPhone](#) 3GS: A smartphone for cheapskates seems like an oxymoron, but the 3GS is still very a popular smartphone for the money. It has been offered free with a two year contract, but you may have to shell out a dollar or so. If you don't need the latest and greatest, and are considering AT&T, a cheap 3GS is worth considering. But it may seem pretty aged by the time the two year contract ends.

- Apple iPad 2: Apple has the tablet market cornered. No one has challenged the iPad's feature set for the dollar. There are some very good high-end Android tablets in this range. But considering some cost more, it is hard to recommend them the Apple iPad 2. It has a 9.7 inch display and 10 hour battery life appeal to many. It remains the benchmark, but it's not the only answer in tablets.

- Amazon Kindle Fire: Its smaller size and lower price make the Kindle Fire appealing. Curling up with a 10 inch tablet like the iPad just is not as cozy as one of the smaller 7 inch tablets. If you can live without features like GPS, cameras, and a restricted version of Android 2.3, the

Fire could be the tablet for you. It will do the basics like email, browsing, handle media, and has access to Amazon's Android app store. Navigation is simple and its browser performs admirably. It has integration with Amazon's media offerings from books to movies. \$199 is still serious coin, but for the tablet arena it is a relative bargain.

- Barnes & Noble Nook Tablet: The \$250 Nook Tablet is another 7 inch device that goes head-to-head with the Kindle Fire. Its fifty dollar premium over the [Kindle Fire](#) may deter those who push the bottom line to the top, but the extra cash does buy you something: an MicroSD slot, more RAM, a slightly faster processor, longer [battery life](#) and a microphone. The Nook Tablet's less reflective screen has generally been given the edge over the Fire's display. Reading display options for the Nook have been praised over the Kindle Fire's rendering. B&N's app selection has grown to over 1,000, but it lags behind Amazon's 8,500.

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