

# Windows Phone an overlooked worthy alternative to Android, iPhone

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There are many smartphone users who are not giving Microsoft's Windows Phone the look it deserves. Together Android and iOS hog more than 80 percent of the U.S. market share. Android's large chunk of the market is split among a horde of devices from several makers while Apple has relatively few.

Then there is Microsoft.

If anyone can wedge into the current smartphone landscape it would be team Redmond. Microsoft recently pushed out its Mango update, otherwise known as Windows Phone 7.5, bringing a substantial refresh to the platform.

## DEBUNKING THE BEST?

Every day I get asked about which [gadgets](#) are "the best." People are sometimes surprised when I suggest they make technical specifications an important, but secondary concern. A top spec camera is useless if the UI interferes with the [user experience](#). A UI that makes the most sense to me may confound an equally intelligent user. Of course chances are, they will be more intelligent than me.

When I'm asked about smartphones, I offer the same advice. Get your hands on them, and see which one makes the most sense.

So, the question is, with just 2 percent of the market in the U.S., does a

new Windows Phone device ... make sense?

Let go of your expectations because the innovation in Windows Phone 7.5 seems to surprise a lot people - some who are harsh Microsoft critics. It is refreshingly organic compared to the rigid, icon-based, and app-centric interfaces of [Android](#) and iOS.

## HUBS, CONTACTS, COMMUNICATION

Rather than building upon pages packed with icons or folders of apps, Mango is designed around a user's interests, which are divided into hubs: People, Pictures, Music and Video, Office and others. These hubs connect and centralize aspects of our digital lives in a way that Android and iOS has largely ignored -even with Siri.

The People hub integrates Facebook, Twitter, [LinkedIn](#) and Windows Live in a way that makes apps almost seem obsolete. From a contact, you can post on their wall, send an email, see recent updates, check out tagged photos or view albums. A helpful history or roundup of communication is there too. All that is within that contact. No folder drilling, page swiping, or app hunting required.

Another cool feature in the People hub is a consolidated feed of notifications from your social networks.

## WORK AND PLAY

Then there is the Office hub armed with OneNote for note-taking, and the tools to create and edit Word documents, Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations. Office 365 provides cloud access to your documents, email, calendar and contacts. There are ways to accomplish similar productivity on competing platforms, but you'll be hard pressed to Match Microsoft here. This is their arena.

If you know and use SkyDrive you'll appreciate Mango's integration. If you don't know SkyDrive you should. It's 25GB of free online storage for your documents, photos, videos and other files.

Microsoft recently released an Xbox Companion app for access to Gamerscore, sending messages, setting a beacon and viewing the Xbox videos, music, games and apps. Your Windows Phone can also work as a media remote with your Xbox.

## CUSTOMIZATION

The Quick Launch screen is Mango's home or start screen, and hosts an array of user selected tiles. Tiles range from live-updating widgets to shortcuts for hubs, apps, contacts, or groups of contacts. They can be added, removed and rearranged.

Windows Phone offers more customization than iOS, but it is not as flexible as Android can be. Windows Phone comes as is. There will be no interface add-ons like Sense, MotoBlur or other skins on top of the OS.

## BING-O

Thanks to a search engine overhaul, Bing gains some cool new tricks. Its "Local Scout" feature uses GPS to provide you with hyper-local search results for restaurants, shopping, events and other local highlights.

Even cooler is the built-in music search that works like Shazam or SoundHound which are popular with iOS and Android users. Press Bing's music search button, let it listen to the music, and it identifies the song, but I found it to be lighter and faster than my experiences with either of those dedicated apps.

Bing's visual search works similarly to Google Goggles. It can analyze QR codes, barcodes, Microsoft Tags book covers, CDs, DVDs and can translate text to and from a variety of languages.

## SHOULD YOU GIVE WINDOWS PHONE A CHANCE?

Sure the Marketplace for [Windows Phone](#) has a fraction of the offerings available in its competitors' app stores. But at over 40,000 apps, most of what you could want is there. It has Angry Birds, Netflix and various streaming music apps.

For an iTunes and Apple user, iOS is hard to not put on the "consider" list. Android's Google services and Flash Player support is unmatched.

But if your world is Word docs and Excel spreadsheets, or your playground is Xbox LIVE, no one spins it better than Microsoft.

Windows Phone's elegant and responsive interface exhibits some of the most innovative thinking in the smartphone arena.

Even with recent Android and iOS updates, they have not really changed all that much from their debut. They have evolved, been polished, even added some cool features, but Microsoft is the one thinking different now.

Been looking for Microsoft's mojo? Windows Phone's delightful and intuitive experience makes Microsoft fun again.

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