

Review: Nokia Lumia 900 hindered by software

April 5 2012, By Troy Wolverton



Once the dominant maker of smartphones, Nokia Corp. is hoping to reassert itself by challenging the new top players, Apple Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co.

Later this month, the Finnish company will release the Lumia 900, its new flagship smartphone. Offered by AT&T, Apple's original partner, and featuring a sleek design and large, 4.3-inch screen, the new device is clearly intended to take on the iPhone and top-of-the-line Android phones.

If you're in the market for a [smartphone](#) and aren't wedded to Android

or Apple's iOS, the Lumia 900 is worth a look, thanks to its low price and easy-to-use operating system. For other consumers, though, the device is likely to prove disappointing.

The Lumia 900 is Nokia's second Windows Phone 7 device to be offered by a U.S. carrier and the first one to be offered by one of the Big Two service providers. It's also the first Nokia Windows Phone device to have a large touch screen, a popular feature on Android devices; an LTE antenna, which can connect to AT&T's new high-speed network; and a front-facing camera for video conferencing.

I haven't been a big fan of jumbo screens - I've often found the devices to be too big and bulky - but I like the size and shape of the Lumia 900. Despite its large screen, it's easy to hold in your hand or slip into your pocket.

I do have one quibble with the design, though: Nokia has arrayed all of the physical buttons - for power, volume and camera shutter - on one side of the device. Because of that and because they are unlabeled, it can be difficult to know which one to press without looking at them. I wish Nokia had separated them by, say, placing the power button on top.

Once you find the power button, the Lumia works like most other Windows Phone 7 devices. It's fairly fast and its interface is easy to navigate.

Nokia says you should get seven hours of talk time and a day's worth of general use on the Lumia 900. I didn't test the talk time, but in light to moderate use, the battery easily lasted a day and usually had enough charge left over to continue into the next.

The Lumia 900's display is based on OLED technology, where the screen itself emits light. This allows it to display deeper blacks than

traditional LCD screens and arguably more vibrant colors. The Lumia's display is beautiful; it is not, however, as high-resolution as either the iPhone's or those on the latest Android devices, so it may seem less sharp by comparison.

I liked the addition of the front-facing camera. We make frequent video calls to my parents in Texas, and it's nice to have that option on a Nokia Windows Phone device. The drawback is the software. The Lumia 900 ships with Tango, which is a perfectly fine video-calling application but not nearly as widely used as Skype or Apple's FaceTime. Fortunately, Microsoft does finally have a version of Skype for Windows Phone 7 in the works.

One feature Nokia touts is the device's 8-megapixel rear camera. I found it to be OK for a cellphone camera but not great. It has a slight delay when taking pictures, so if your subject is moving, you might not get the shot you want or it might be blurry.

Perhaps the best feature of the Lumia 900 is its price. At \$100 - with a two-year service agreement - it's half the price of the least expensive iPhone 4S and \$200 less expensive than the Razr Maxx, a phone with relatively similar specifications.

But the Lumia 900 does have some significant shortcomings. Nokia and its partners offer some exclusive applications, the most notable being Nokia Drive, a free-to-use turn-by-turn navigation program. But it doesn't come pre-installed. Instead, you have to somehow know about it and download it from the Windows Marketplace.

That's a painstaking process in part because the app's associated maps are huge - the one for the Americas alone is nearly 2 gigabytes. Worse, even when installed, the Drive app isn't integrated with the Windows Phone 7 system, which points to the default map application rather than

Drive when you look up an address or ask for directions.

A bigger problem for the Lumia 900 is the Windows Phone software. While the number of apps for Windows Phone 7 is steadily increasing, it still is a small fraction of what you'll find for the iPhone or Android devices. If you are considering switching from one of those platforms, beware that you may miss out on your favorite apps.

Rovio has said it won't make a version of "Angry Birds Space," the latest iteration of its hit game, for Windows Phone 7 - at least not anytime soon. Skype's coming but hasn't arrived. And other top apps, such as Pandora, Draw Something, Camera+ and Infinity Available just aren't available.

The other big shortcoming is with the Internet Explorer browser in Windows Phone 7. Microsoft has chosen not to support Adobe's Flash technology in the mobile version of Internet Explorer. Compared with the browsers that ship with the iPhone or with Android devices, I.E. also does a poor job of displaying elements encoded in HTML5, which is starting to replace Flash. The end result is that there's a lot of multimedia Web content you just can't see.

Still, for those new to smartphones, the Lumia 900 is a good option to consider. It's well-designed, fun to use and a bargain to boot.

NOKIA LUMIA 900:

-Rating: 7.5 out of 10

-Likes: Sleek design; fast LTE antenna; bright, vibrant screen; ability to make video calls; low price

-Dislikes: Nokia's free navigation software isn't pre-installed or integrated into the system; relatively few [Windows Phone](#) apps; many popular apps unavailable; browser lacks support for Flash and many HTML5 standards

-Specs: 1.4 GHz single-core processor; 1-megapixel front and 8-megapixel rear cameras; 16 gigabytes of internal storage; 4.3-inch OLED display

-Price: \$100 with a two-year contract

-Web: [nokia.com](#), [wireless.att.com](#)

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