

Will smart watches find many buyers?

July 30 2013, by Troy Wolverton

When it comes to the target market for a smart watch, I'm probably it: I love tech, I'm often an early adopter of new gadgets and, until very recently, I was a lifelong watch wearer. But even I'm not sure I really need or want a smart watch.

These high-tech watches have been in the news lately. Pebble's smart watch recently made its retail debut in Best Buy. The second generation of Sony's wrist gadget is set to hit stores in September. And rumors have been flying that Apple, Google and Samsung all have their own smart watches in the works.

But at least as they exist now, smart watches seem too limited to convince me to wear one. And if I'm not all that interested, I've got to figure [electronics companies](#) are going to have an even harder time convincing other consumers.

See, my dad is an ardent watch wearer and collector, and his interest rubbed off on me. Even though most Americans gave up wearing watches about the time they got their first cellphones, I continued to wear a [wristwatch](#) until about a year ago. I'd probably be wearing it still if I hadn't lost the back to it.

I've since learned to live without it and just check my phone for the time and date. Given that I nearly always have my phone with me, I haven't really missed my watch, much to my dad's dismay.

And the fact is that my phone is a lot more useful as a timekeeping

device than my real watch - a 20-year-old analog Swiss Army Watch knockoff - ever was. I use it daily to time and map my runs with my dog, having it alert me every time I hit a mile mark. When I'm on the road, I use it as an [alarm clock](#). And I've preset one of my apps with numerous timers that remind me to flip the fish I'm grilling or take the [coffee beans](#) out of their roaster.

Still, I can see some of the appeal of a smart watch.

When I'm running, I often carry my phone in my hand. That's awkward, especially when I'm holding my dog's leash in the same hand.

I could buy an armband or a belt clip to put it in, but when I'm running I sometimes like to check the time or how far I've gone. I could see how a smart watch would not only be easier to carry, but also might allow me to check the time and my pace more easily than I can with my smartphone.

There have also been times I've struggled to get my phone out of my pocket when it rings. It would be easier to simply glance at a watch to see who's calling and determine whether I need to answer it.

But I'm not sure I want to carry around another device, and that's the big shortcoming of smart watches as they exist today. They're typically accessories to a smartphone, not stand-alone devices. Because smart watches don't have their own Internet connection, most everything you see on them comes from your smartphone via a Bluetooth link.

So to monitor my running app on a smart watch, I'd still have to carry my smartphone, which means I'd still have to find a place to put it.

And while being able to quickly see who's calling might be helpful for screening calls, I'd still need to pull my phone out of my pocket to talk on it.

Smart watches have another limitation: the size of their screen. You just can't fit a big display on a wrist-worn device. And with only an inch or so of screen space, a smart watch really can't do very much.

Sure, you could see the latest Facebook post from a friend on your watch. But if you really want to see your full news feed, you're going to have to do that on some other device. And who wants to play simple games like tick-tack-toe on a tiny screen when you can play much more enjoyable ones on your smartphone or tablet?

I'm willing to keep an open mind about smart watches. I'm eager to see what Apple, Google and Samsung come up with. And I'm excited that someday, with built-in [cellphone](#) antennas and potentially bigger and more flexible screens, they may be able to replace smartphones rather than simply supplement them.

But for now, I'm probably going to keep my wrists bare, even if it does pain my father.

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