

Review: Samsung Galaxy Mega proves bigger isn't always better

October 3 2013, by Troy Wolverton, San Jose Mercury News



It's hard to believe that Samsung is a Korean company since one of the key pieces of its strategic playbook seems to come straight from classic American product marketing: Make it bigger.

First Samsung took its flagship [smartphone](#), the Galaxy S series, and gradually ramped up the screen size from 4 inches to 5 inches. Then it

introduced a new, even bigger smartphone, the Galaxy Note, which has gone, over three generations, from a 5.3-inch display to a 5.7-inch one. And now comes the Samsung Galaxy Mega, whose comically large 6-inch screen gives it a display that's almost as large as those on mini-tablets such as Google's Galaxy Nexus 7.

Samsung's move into larger screen sizes represents an intentional effort to blur the lines between smartphones and tablets, creating a whole new category of devices sometimes called "phablets." I'm not a fan of them; I found both of the first two models of the Galaxy Note, one of the first phablets, to be unwieldy and unsatisfying.

But Samsung has found a market for such devices, and the Mega is, in some ways, the next step in their evolution. With the Mega, Samsung has created a gadget for folks who want both a smartphone and a tablet, but can't afford two different devices.

Unfortunately, the Mega fails at this dual mission. As you might expect, given its jumbo size, the Mega is even more unwieldy and uncomfortable to use and carry around as a phone than the Note. While it works much better as a small tablet, you can find much better tablets on the market that cost little more up front and don't come with a pricey two-year service contract.

The Mega looks like a super-sized Galaxy S4. It has a similar shape, with similarly rounded corners and edges. And it's actually as thin as the svelte S4. Regrettably, it also comes with the cheap-feeling, thin plastic back that Samsung put on the S4.

But that's not the only design shortfall of the Mega. If you intend to use it as a phone, its sheer size is a problem. It's too big to fit securely in a shirt pocket or comfortably in a front pants pocket. Unless you have mammoth hands, you'll also likely find that it's simply uncomfortable to

hold up to the ear to talk on. And you can forget trying to text with one hand.

Samsung is marketing the Mega as an affordable large-screen smartphone, which is a way of saying the company scrimped on many of the device's components.

For example, the Mega's large screen is a relatively low-resolution one, with lower pixel density than not only the S4, but Google's Nexus 7. In comparison with those devices, text, graphics and video will be less sharp on the Mega.

Samsung also put in place a much less powerful processor than you'd find on other devices. In my benchmark tests, the dual-core Qualcomm chips were slower and less powerful than those in Apple's year-old iPhone 5. Its graphics processing was also significantly slower than the iPhone 5's.

Benchmark measures of speed and performance don't necessarily mean much in everyday use, but the Mega did feel sluggish at times launching and switching between applications.

The Mega's jumbo screen does have some benefits. The extra room it needs also provides space for an extra-large battery that offers extended use. I found that I was able to use the Mega intermittently over the course of two or three days before I needed to recharge it.

Its large screen also helps it serve as a handy e-book reader. It's more portable than even a 7-inch tablet and its larger screen is easier to read from than that of smaller smartphones.

It works well as a portable movie player for similar reasons. It's lighter than a mini-tablet, so easier to hold for the length of a TV episode or

movie. But its screen is easier to watch than a smartphone-sized one.

Samsung has included with the Mega some of the software and features it's developed for the Note and other devices. You can split the display between two separate apps using a feature Samsung calls "Multi Window." It has a built-in infrared emitter that allows you to use it as a remote control for your TV and set-top box.

The WatchON remote app is easy to configure and works well. It includes a recommendation engine that suggests shows and movies for you to watch and helps you tune them in. I found the suggestions hit-or-miss, but the recommendations are supposed to improve the more you use the app.

Multi Window is less satisfying. Dividing a 6-inch screen in half leaves little room to display individual apps, so you only see a small portion of a Web page or your inbox. What's more, the feature only works with a handful of apps that you have to launch from a special task bar. If you launch them from anywhere else, they will run full screen.

Overall, I like the Mega as an ultra-mini-tablet. But I'd like it a lot more if it didn't come with a two-year contract - and wasn't pretending to be a phone.

SAMSUNG GALAXY MEGA SMARTPHONE:

-Likes: Thin and light; large screen well-suited for reading, movie watching; long battery life; works well as [remote control](#) for entertainment center.

-Dislikes: Display is relatively low resolution; some features such as

Multi Window compatible with only a small number of apps; unwieldy to carry around or use as a phone; processor is relatively underpowered; with two-year contract, is much pricier than typical mini-tablet.

-Specs: 1.7 GHz, dual-core processor; 6.3-inch, 1280 x 720 display; 1.9 megapixel front and 8 megapixel rear cameras.

-Price: \$150 with two-year contract

-Web: samsung.com

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