

Review: Updated HTC One phone worth considering

March 25 2014, by Anick Jesdanun



Credit: HTC

The HTC One might be the best smartphone you never heard of. The phone won critical acclaim last year, yet it barely made a dent in the marketplace. It's overshadowed by Apple's iPhones and Samsung's Galaxy line of smartphones.

Good thing HTC Corp. doesn't understand defeat.

An [updated One](#) expands on some of the features that made it notable.

The new One has an all-metal design like last year's model, but it feels smoother and more comfortable in my hands. The back edges are now curved and remind me of the sleek finish in Apple's latest iPads. HTC also turns its hub for personalized content, the BlinkFeed, into a companion rather than an unwelcomed guest.

HTC is making the Android [phone](#) available through all major carriers simultaneously this time, starting Tuesday online and April 10 in retail stores. Verizon customers don't have to wait months, as they had last year.

The new phone, known officially as HTC One (M8), will cost about \$200 to \$250 with a two-year service contract, or about \$650 without a contract. Customers can choose gray, gold or silver.

The One still has some flaws—namely, its 4 megapixel rear camera. By comparison, Samsung's upcoming Galaxy S5 phone will have 16 megapixels, while Sony and Nokia already have phones that exceed 20 megapixels. Apple's iPhones are at 8 megapixels, twice what the HTC One offers. More megapixels typically translate to sharper images and more options for printing and cropping.

HTC is correct in saying the megapixel count is just one factor in what makes a good camera. It prefers making the size of individual pixel sensors larger to absorb more light for night and indoor shots. That's laudable, but Apple's iPhone 5S and Nokia's Lumia Icon are both able to offer decent low-light shots while providing more megapixels than the One.

Compared with last year's model, though, the One's camera is much better, even at 4 megapixels. Colors look washed out in day shots I took with last year's camera. The new model seems to have fixed that. The new version also has a 5 megapixel front camera for selfies, far better

than what rivals offer.



The new HTC One is demonstrated, Tuesday, March 25, 2014 in New York. HTC is updating its flagship HTC One smartphone by giving it a larger screen, better software and a camera that's easier to use. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

HTC also has improved its camera software:

— The phone now captures depth information, allowing you to decide later whether to focus on the foreground or the background while blurring everything else. Other phones also offer this capability, but the One does this automatically. You don't have to switch to a special mode

ahead of time.

— The One offers plenty of manual settings, as other phones are starting to offer. The One goes further in letting you save frequently used combinations of settings. If you take a lot of action shots indoors, for instance, you can save a combo that uses a fast shutter speed to reduce blurring from motion, while adjusting the white balance to filter out the hint of color from the ceiling lights.

— You can pause video recordings. Most phones only let you stop recording, so you have to stitch together several files with software to get the same effect. The Vine and Instagram apps also let you pause video recording, but those clips have length limits. With the One, you're limited only by the phone's storage.

As for watching video, sound quality is wonderful, thanks to the phone's two front-facing speakers. If I hold the phone close enough to my eyes and slide the volume to maximum, I can pretend I'm watching in a movie theater. Phones with rear speakers sound boxy by comparison.

The One also has some useful shortcuts. Double tap on a dark screen to get the lock screen. Swipe an icon up to get the camera, the phone or another app. Swipe from the left to get the BlinkFeed content hub, and swipe from the right to get your regular home screen.

With an optional \$50 Dot View case, you can see the time and the weather through the small holes, or dots, on the case's front, flip cover. You can answer and reject incoming call by swiping on the case, without needing to flip over the cover.

As for BlinkFeed, the One now offers more ways to customize it and increases the number of social media services it works with. Through a partnership with Foursquare, BlinkFeed also suggests restaurants based

on the time and location. Monday's lunch recommendation was dubious, though: It was suggesting frozen yogurt at Pinkberry as outdoor temperatures in New York hovered at water's freezing point.

I do like that you can get BlinkFeed by swiping from the left. Otherwise, it stays out of the way. To get back to the home screen, just tap the home button once or twice. I hated BlinkFeed in last year's model because there was no easy way to restore the [home screen](#) without knowing the proper swipes.

The HTC One is a work in progress, though. There's supposed to be a power-saving mode offering 15 hours of battery life when you're down to a 5 percent charge. There are also supposed to be ways to blend video, photos and music from other One users. These promised features weren't done in time for the U.S. release. But if you buy the phone now, you'll get them through upcoming software updates.

U.S. customers are also eligible for a one-time replacement of cracked screens. The replacement is free, though you'll be without a phone for up to two weeks. For \$29, HTC will ship a replacement phone overnight. You send the damaged one back.

The One doesn't have a fingerprint sensor to bypass the security code on the lock screen. The iPhone 5S has it, as will the Galaxy S5. It's also in the HTC One Max, a larger version of last year's model. But HTC's version didn't work well, and the company is wise to leave it out in the One.

There's a lot to like in the new phone. This phone likely won't be as popular as the iPhone or the S5, but the One is one worth considering if you're looking for something that feels right and works nicely.

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Citation: Review: Updated HTC One phone worth considering (2014, March 25) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-03-htc-worth.html>

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