

Review: With Galaxy S5, Samsung proves less can be more

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Samsung Electronics Co. has produced the most formidable rival yet to the iPhone 5S: the Galaxy S5. The device, released over the weekend, is the fifth edition of the company's successful line of Galaxy S smartphones. Its predecessor, the Galaxy S4, sold more than 10 million units worldwide just one month after being launched last year.

The Galaxy S5 may be more of an incremental step forward from its predecessor and will face more competition from capable, lower-cost devices. But the new Galaxy is expected to be one of the highest-selling phones in the U.S. this year.

"At the end of the day, it's the Galaxy brand, and with the push it will have in marketing, I'm sure the phone will sell well," said Carolina Milanesi, chief of research at consumer research firm Kantar World Panel. "Is it going to do more than the S4? I think the market is tougher this time around."

With the Galaxy S5, Samsung is showing that less can be more.

A year ago, Samsung tried to blow away consumers - as well as its chief rival, Apple Inc.'s iPhone - by packing seemingly every feature known to man into one device. The Galaxy S4 was a success, but consumers struggled to grasp the full capabilities of the device.

To improve user experience, Samsung has gone the opposite way with the Galaxy S5.

It consolidated many features into more understandable groups and eliminated other features altogether. The deleted features are still available to users through downloads so that customers can add features one by one, introducing themselves to each element over time.

This makes the Galaxy S5 a smartphone that is a lot easier to get to know than its predecessor.

Rather than trying to explain hundreds of features, Samsung instead focused on a few that make this device stand out from its peers. The phone has a top-notch screen, great durability, an improved camera, a long-lasting battery and useful health tracking capabilities.

With the Galaxy S5's 5.1-inch 1080p HD screen, Samsung knocks it out of the park in screen quality, delivering a display with sharp colors that are perfect for viewing videos and photographs.

The Galaxy S5's screen is slightly larger than the GS4's 5-inch screen, so the phone is a little longer. But it's easier to hold thanks to a grippable back cover with faux leather.

But when it comes to design, Samsung is still outflanked by Apple and HTC, which just released the highly stylish One (M8). If looks are important, buy an attractive case or pick another smartphone.

What the Galaxy S5 lacks in aesthetics it makes up for in durability.

The phone is now rated for Ingress Protection 67, which means it is dust- and water-resistant. Samsung says the phone can be kept under as much as 3 feet of water for 30 minutes. In practical terms, IP 67 ensures that the phone won't be damaged by rain or an accidental drop in a toilet.

I tested the feature by rinsing it under a faucet and dipping it in a glass of water. It kept working just fine.

Samsung also improved the phone's camera, upping the rear lens to 16 megapixels from 13. The device takes some of the best photos of any camera phone, delivering images with vibrant colors.

Its Phase Detection Autofocus software enables the camera to focus three times faster than other smartphones, according to Samsung. I'm not sure whether it lives up to those stats, but the Galaxy S5 did focus pretty quickly.

The phone also can shoot photos in burst mode using high-dynamic range, or HDR, imaging, which combines multiple images into one with

high-quality lighting throughout. Previously, users could shoot photos in HDR mode, but not in rapid sequence.

The camera also includes a new Shot & More mode, which lets customers use one of five nifty effects. On the Galaxy S4, one effect had to be picked before taking a photo. The process is now reversed so customers can shoot first and pick the effect later.

The battery on the Galaxy S5 lasts longer than its predecessor. And a new Ultra Power Saving Mode helps extend each charge by shutting off nearly everything on the phone except messages, calls and the ability to surf the Web.

The new power-saving feature also conserves energy with a black-and-white mode that uses only some pixels on the screen. That provides about 24 hours of battery life even after the phone has fallen to the last 10 percent of its charge.

Samsung has given the Galaxy S5 a healthy dose of fitness help. Like the Galaxy S4, the phone includes a pedometer and the S Health fitness app, which enables users to input what they eat. The Galaxy S5 also includes a heart-rate monitor so users can check their heart rate by launching the app and placing an index finger on the monitor.

The new smartphone also has caught up with the iPhone 5S by adding fingerprint technology that lets users unlock their phones by scanning a finger over the home button.

The nation's four major cellphone carriers are offering the Galaxy S5 for \$200 to \$250 with two-year contracts or up to \$660 to buy the [phone](#) without a contract.

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