

# Samsung's Galaxy S8 phone aims to dispel the Note 7 debacle

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In this Friday, March 24, 2017, photo, new Samsung Galaxy S8, left, and Galaxy S8 Plus mobile phones are displayed in New York. The Galaxy S8 features a larger display than its predecessor, the Galaxy S7, and sports a voice assistant intended to rival Siri and Google Assistant. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

Samsung seems to be playing it safe—at least with its battery—as it unveils its first major smartphone since the embarrassing recall of its fire-prone Note 7.

The Galaxy S8 will come in two sizes, both bigger than comparable models from last year. To maximize display space, there's no more physical home button. The S8 also sports a voice assistant intended to rival Siri and Google Assistant.

But battery capacity isn't increasing, despite the larger sizes, meaning more breathing room for the battery. Samsung had pushed the engineering envelope with the Note 7 battery, which contributed to spontaneous combustions. That recall cost Samsung at least \$5.3 billion. Though many customers remain loyal, any further misstep could prove fatal.

The phone, announced Wednesday in New York, will come out April 21. The standard-size S8 will cost about \$750 and the larger S8 Plus about \$850—both about \$100 more than comparable iPhones and rival Android phones.

"That's a big bet that its phones will justify a higher price, whereas it could have used these new phones as a way to drive higher sales after a couple of years of stagnation," said Jan Dawson, an analyst with Jackdaw Research.



In this Friday, March 24, 2017, photo, a Samsung Galaxy S8 mobile phone is shown partially submerged to demonstrate its water resistance, in New York. The Galaxy S8 features a larger display than its predecessor, the Galaxy S7, and sports a voice assistant intended to rival Siri and Google Assistant. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

## ABOUT THAT BATTERY

Samsung has blamed the Note 7 fires on multiple design and manufacturing defects in its batteries. Inspectors concluded some of the batteries were too small for their capacity, putting pressure on the internal structure.

The company says phones will now go through multiple inspections, including X-rays and stress tests at extreme temperatures. And Samsung no longer is trying to squeeze a lot of battery power in a small space. The S8 Plus model, for instance, has 3 percent less battery power than the

Galaxy S7 Edge, but the phone itself is 12 percent larger.

Samsung says software and chip improvements mean the new phones will still last all day.

## BIGGER, TALLER SCREENS



In this Friday, March 24, 2017, photo, the new Samsung Gear 360 camera, right, Gear VR headset, and controller are displayed during a preview in New York. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

The S8 phone's display measures 5.8 inches diagonally, compared with 5.1 inches on the S7. The S8 Plus will be 6.2 inches, compared with S7 Edge's 5.5 inches and the Note 7's 5.7 inches. Samsung is getting rid of the "Edge" distinction and bringing curved sides to all S8 phones.

Samsung has also made it easier to look at apps without scrolling as much. It enlarged the screen by minimizing the frame, or bezel, surrounding the display; gone is a horizontal strip with the home button at the bottom. Instead, Samsung is embedding a virtual home button in the display and moving the fingerprint sensor to the back. In addition, both S8 models are taller than their predecessors, but widths are roughly the same. That makes them easy to hold in one hand.

## VOICE ASSISTANT

Samsung claims its new voice assistant, Bixby, will do much more than rivals from Apple, Google, Microsoft and Amazon. For one thing, Samsung says Bixby will be able to handle any smartphone task currently managed by touch. When viewing a photo, just say "send this to Bob" to pull up messaging options and contact information for the Bobs you know. Bixby will also offer information on books, wine and other products scanned with the phone's camera.

But there's a major caveat: Bixby will work only with selected Samsung apps, including the photo gallery and messages, along with Google Play Music. Not all touch commands will have voice counterparts right away. Other apps will be able to adopt Bixby, but Samsung has had a mixed track record in getting other companies to support its home-brewed functions, such as an "Air View" feature for showing pop-up previews of content. Never seen it? Exactly.





In this Friday, March 24, 2017, photo, the Bixby function of the new Samsung Galaxy S8 Plus is demonstrated in New York. The Galaxy S8 features a larger display than its predecessor, the Galaxy S7, and sports a voice assistant intended to rival Siri and Google Assistant. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

"I think the brand will struggle to compete in the longer term with the broader digital ecosystems from Google, Amazon or Apple," Forrester analyst Thomas Husson said.

## OTHER FEATURES

The front camera is getting a boost to 8 megapixels, from 5 megapixels, while the rear one stays at 12 megapixels.

As with previous models, the S8 is water and dust resistant and features a memory card slot to supplement 64 gigabytes of built-in storage, which

is higher than the base models of most rivals. The S8 will get an iris scanner to let people unlock the phone by looking at it ; the feature was new in the ditched Note 7 phone.

Samsung will include premium earbuds from AKG, a brand it acquired when it bought Harman International.



In this Friday, March 24, 2017, photo, a Samsung Galaxy S8 Plus mobile phone is docked in a DeX device during a preview, in New York. The Galaxy S8 features a larger display than its predecessor, the Galaxy S7, and sports a voice assistant intended to rival Siri and Google Assistant. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

## BEYOND THE S8

Samsung's virtual-reality camera, Gear 360, will now accommodate a

higher resolution, known as 4K, and work with iPhones, not just Samsung phones.

An optional docking station will turn the S8 phone into a desktop computer when connected to a regular TV. In that mode, people will be able to resize windows and work with several apps at once. It's similar to what Microsoft offers on its Windows 10 phones. Samsung also unveiled a router that doubles as a hub for internet-connected appliances and lights.

Samsung said its previously announced Gear VR headset upgrade, which will now include a hand-held controller, will go on sale in April for about \$130. Existing owners can buy just the controller for about \$40. The company hasn't announced prices and release dates for the other accessories.

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