

\$1,000 for a smartphone? How about \$100?

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The Samsung Galaxy J phone won't win any critics awards.

It has a smaller 5-inch LCD screen to the brighter 6.4-inch AMOLED display of the top of the line S10+, a weaker battery and processor and less storage, 16 GB vs. 128 GB.

But the S10+ starts at \$899, and if you've got the cash for it, great.

You could also pick up the J at B&H Photo for \$99 and get yourself a working smartphone that will let you do everything you probably want to do, like make and receive calls, text, use apps, take photos and the like.

You don't have to spend \$1,000 for a smartphone, despite what Apple and Samsung continue to tell you, in trying to entice you into buying the latest iPhone or premium Galaxy phone.

We found many, many choices in the \$100 range, either low-price phones aimed at developing countries, like the J, Chinese brands that specialize in low-price phones, older models, like the J, that have since been upgraded and plenty of refurbished recent models from 2016 and 2017.

We tried out the J, as well as other under \$100 phones, the Nokia 2 and Alcatel Dawn, using service from Mint Mobile and Unreal Mobile.

What worked

Everything. We made calls, answered them, texted, surfed the Web, took and shared photos, downloaded and uses apps.

The fine print

On the downside, these cheap phones are slower than what you may be used to with premium phones, the screens aren't as pretty to look at, and your pictures will be lower resolution than on top-of-the-line iPhones and Galaxy units.

You won't be able to shoot video in 4K resolution—you won't even get

to 1080p high definition—but instead 720p. Shooting panoramas, time-lapse videos and in [slow motion](#) are features you won't get.

But if you're, say, a parent with four kids looking to get a cheap phone for each of them, there's no reason to spend bundles of cash on the expensive models. Or, if you don't make enough money to warrant dropping \$1,000 or more on the latest iPhone (the top of the line XS Max actually starts at \$1,099), you have a good alternative.

"You have 95% of the marketing for phones directed to the top end phones," says Stephen Stokels, CEO of Unreal Mobile, which markets low-priced wireless service. "The reality is, you have a lot of good phones available for under \$100, and the tech differences between \$100 and \$1,000 is just not that significant."

Going slow

Of the three we tried, the Dawn was the slowest, with Nokia in the middle and the Galaxy J performing the best of all.

And by slow, we mean opening an app or website and waiting for it load. And slow is a relative term. On the S10+, waiting for Google Maps to load took two seconds, versus four seconds on the J, five seconds for the Nokia and six for the Dawn.

You can see the differences by examining the specs: The Dawn has a 1.1 GHz processor, to 1.3 GHz for the Nokia and 1.4 GHz for the J. The faster the processor, the faster the response. That's why the J opened Maps faster than the others.

What to look for

So in looking for your cheap phones, identify a price you're willing to work with, and take a good, hard look at the specs. Get the fastest processor, most storage and strongest battery you can find for your budget. On the MintMobile website, for instance, the Motorola E4 (\$159) touts a 1.4 GHz processor, to 1.1 GHz for the \$89 Alcatel Tetra. So clearly the E4 has more power.

What about refurb?

Stokols recommends opting for a refurbished phone versus a used model, as they get cleaned and parts replaced, and they usually come with warranties. "They are like new," he says.

But I need an iPhone!

The best deals for cheap phones are for Android models. What about an iPhone? Unreal sells a refurbished iPhone 5 for \$99, but you might want to spend a little more if you need to have an Apple phone. The current iOS software, which Apple updates yearly, doesn't work with the 5, though it does work with the 5S. Prospective buyers should opt for the 6 or 6S series instead.

Older 6 and 6S models are available online, usually as refurbs or used, as the most current model Apple sells is the 7, which was initially released in 2016. It sells for \$449. But the deal on an iPhone, if you're willing to live with a smaller 4-inch screen, is the SE. This phone has been discontinued by Apple, but the company continues to sell new models for \$250, with a full 1-year warranty. The starter [phone](#) has 32 GB of storage. An even better deal is getting the [model](#) with 128 GB of storage for \$299.

And what about cheap service?

MintMobile, which you may remember from its Super Bowl ads, has a monthly \$15 offering, with unlimited calls and texting, and 3 gigabytes of data. (You'll need to commit to a full year after the three month trial to lock down the rate.) Unreal Mobile offers calls and 1 GB of data for \$10 monthly, or \$20 monthly with 3 GB.

This compares to \$50 a month, for instance, with 3 GB of data, from AT&T.

Happy shopping!

More information: Mark Gillings et al. The origins of Avebury, *Antiquity* (2019). [DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2019.37](https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2019.37)

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