HTC Touch: Window's Answer to the iPhone

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Layout Editor

As touch screens and cell phones take over the technical market, it only seems natural that the two would eventually combine and create what we now know as a "smartphone."

Smartphones allow access to email, internet, music, news, weather, instant messaging and maps. Quite impressive for such small handheld devices.

Window's HTC Touch (formally known as the "Elf") is a lesser known smartphone, at least to Americans. It was released in Europe early this summer, but did not hit U.S. stores until November 4th. Even then, the HTC Touch is on the downlow, drowned under the noisy hype about the iPhone. Its availability in stores (or rather, lack there of) has not helped the Touch's publicity either. The HTC Touch is only sold in Sprint stores. It is not at Best Buy or Circuit City, two of the largest technological stores in the U.S., and it is not sold in any other cell phone stores, whereas the iPhone is much easier to find spread throughout the numerous Cingular and Apple stores.

The HTC Touch's main attractions are its TouchFlow hardware, it runs Windows Mobile 6.0 (an operating system that has the main components for many home computers) and is compatible with the Bluetooth headset.

TouchFlow is what makes the touchscreen work. It makes the screen sensitive to touch by both stylus and finger. However, you would be better off using your fingers to navigate through the menus. The stylus does not always apply enough pressure to activate a response from the Touch. However, the TouchFlow capabilities do not work on the HTC Touch when it is in LandScape mode, where the view is stretched horizontally, and not the normal vertical view.

Smartphones are expected to have a minimal number of buttons and to be mostly touch-based. The HTC Touch accomplishes this goal very well with only a start call, end call, and five way directonal button on its surface. This keeps the interface simple, and easy to work with.

Of course, this means typing and dialing are all done on the Touch's touch screen, which poses a problem when typing. The buttons to press are too small, and you are forced to use the provided stylus on the keyboard. It's a hassle, and difficult to manuver around. This is the biggest problem with the HTC Touch, especially when its competitor, the iPhone, has pretty much perfect button sizes that are easy to handle.

The Touch's keyboard problem makes it difficult to send emails, chats and anything else that needs to be typed. The HTC Touch is not recommended for anyone who is a heavy email or text user, as you'd only be frustrated and want to throw it out a window.

The phone capabilities of the HTC Touch are average, there's minimal hissing and interference. The speaker phone quality is very poor, and not worth the trouble. For best sound quality, use headphones. There are a set of headphones included in the packaging with the HTC Touch.

Of course, no smartphone would be complete without a camera. The HTC Touch has a two mega pixel camera, and although there are no flash capabilities, there is a zoom option. The pictures turn out decently, it's not a high quality digital camera, but for quick shots here and there it is pretty good. The Touch has a 240 x 320 pixel resolution.

The interface on the HTC Touch is rather compelling, it is easy to navigate through and there are no lists of submenus to go through to get to the program you are looking for.

The HTC Touch really is pocket sized at 4"x 2.4"x .6". Smaller than the iPhone. Regular price is around $500, but it can be found online for around $250 with ease, making it less expensive than the iPhone at $400.

The battery life is something of importance when it comes to mobile gadgets, and the Touch ranges about average with its maximum talk time of 4 hours, half the time of the iPhone's 8 hours. The Touch has a 512 mega byte removable memory card, but that's nothing in comparison the the 8 gigabytes of the iPhone.

The video capabilites on the Touch are average. They are not exceedingly grandeur, but they aren't bad. Compared to the iPhone's decent quality, they are on par.

The average consumer looking for a smartphone will look for the prettiest packaging they can find, and while the HTC Touch does fill that category nicely, with its sleek rectangular shape and subtle but attractive coloration, the iPhone still has it beat by a long shot.

The HTC Touch has a slot on its side to insert an SIM card (a card that allows a user to switch phones, but still have the same service) and a microSD card (a memory card), but it's almost impossible to open, which defeats the purpose of having the slots on the side of the device.

Still, the greatest pull the HTC Touch has is its TouchFlow technology, but while it is rather compelling, it is still not enough to compete with the iPhone's more put-together features.

The Touch is a solid phone, especially when considering the worst you have to deal with is a small keyboard. Windows still cannot expect to outsell the iPhone, which is a better phone with features like a light sensor, proximity sensor, and an orientation sensor, along with google maps, and a youtube icon. The iPhone has more going for it than the HTC Touch. Even though the Touch is a solid phone, the iPhone has more sugar in its cookie. The HTC Touch's tantalizing TouchFlow capabilities only earn it three out of five

Quick Picks

Andrew Chapman
Comics Editor

BOOK:

"Astro City: Life in the Big City"

We've no doubt grown accustomed to the classic superhero vs. super villain story seen in many comics. But exactly how does this battle appear to one of the many civilians caught in the middle of the action? What significance might this battle hold to one of the super villainís many henchmen? Or even an undercover agent for an alien race who has been monitoring super powered battles as way to scout for any potential threats to his races upcoming invasion of earth?

This is where the stories in "Astro City" begin, by presenting a collection of stories from the perspectives of residents (be they super powered or not) of the large city, where superheroes are just part of the daily life. The interesting premise is backed up by an excellent attention to detail and scale from writer Kurt Busiek, creative consultant and cover artist Alex Ross, and interior artist Brent Anderson. All three men work to create a world that seems real while at the same time manages to retain the sci-fi and fantasy elements present in most superhero comics. Astro City really feels like a living breathing city, with its own history, neighborhoods, businesses, and residents. Great attention is also given to its superheroes and villains who are multi-dimensional in their characterization regardless of how big their role might be in a particular story.

"Astro City: Life in the Big City" is a collection of the first volume in the series and serves as a great introduction to the series. It is supplemented with a cover art and concept sketch gallery, as well as an introduction by writer Kurt Busiek. All of which is lain out in a unique way that pertains to the mood of the stories.

TELEVISION:

"Ninja Warrior"

An American import of the Japanese game show "Sasukeí" "Ninja Warrior" pits contestants against a four stage obstacle course that put their strength and balance to the test. Passing even the first stage of the obstacle course is no walk in the park as the obstacles require a great deal of skill. Obstacles such as Stage 1ís "Jump Hang" (where competitors must jump on a trampoline and immediately latch on to a net) and "Warped Wall" (where competitors must run up and climb over a curved wall), and Stages 3ís "Globe Grab" (in which competitors must cross by only holding on to sphere-shaped grips); keep the tension high and demonstrate the skill needed to pass the competition.

To succeed you need to be in extraordinary physical condition, have quick reflexes and an ability to perform under intense conditions. The obstacles change each competition, making the obstacle course quite difficult to strategize. Many of the showís all-stars train all year to participate in the biannual competition and out of the eight years the show has run, only a handful of people have made it to the final stage with two actually completing all four stages.

The program showcases the best and most memorable attempts at the obstacle course, from the unique competitors and characters to the intensity of the final stages. "Ninja Warrior" will definitely give you a great balance of drama, suspense, and comedy.

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