

Free At Last. My Phone Contract Ends and I Get Smartphone Advice From My Partner



Square in action!

At long last, my two-year contract with my current cell phone carrier is over and I am free again! Of course, I immediately turned to my son & partner Abraham for some sage smartphone advice. Here's the conversation we had.

Mary Pat: What things should I consider when choosing a smartphone?

Abraham: Smartphones are so much more than just telephones, so the first question is always **"How will you be using it?"**. If you really just need to make the occasional phone call from the road and nothing else, you probably don't even need a smartphone. A simple, old-fashioned flip phone, or bar-style device will do just fine. For everyone else, picture the things you'll want to do on the phone. Is it mostly a business device- checking emails, editing documents, and having access to critical data? Or will you also want to watch streaming videos in your downtime, play games, or take pictures and movies to send to friends and family? It's easy to look at a phone's capabilities and stereotype what the average user would be like: **iPhones seem so hip, Blackberrys seem so serious, Androids seem so geeky.** The reality is that all smartphones on the market today probably have enough muscle (and apps!) to make anyone happy. So choose a phone based on

features, comfort, and specifications – not the label or the image that comes with it.

Another thing to consider is that in the United States, most mobile phones are “carrier specific”, meaning that they only work with one service. This means picking a carrier may be even more important than picking a phone. Coverage maps, and promises on commercials are one thing, but I would **ask your friends and colleagues about their phones**. If a friend has a new phone, ask them how they like it, who they’re with, and how happy they’ve been with the service. Most people that have been living and working in an area for any amount of time have a pretty good idea how their cell reception is, so talk to people you live or work near. If you’re a road-warrior, ask other warriors in the airport what they use and like.

Mary Pat: Does it make sense to change phones or carriers since my contract is up?

Abraham: Of course! I think most people, even casual users of mobile devices, are ready to have a new device by the time their contract is up. In two years, a lot will have changed, making new phones available that have more capabilities, power, and features. Many people decide to sign a contract extension to get a good price or rebate on a new phone.

Of course, maybe in the two years you’ve grown weary of your service plan itself. Most companies will let you change your service plan even if the contract isn’t currently up. They’d rather you pay for more or less minutes a month that just break the contract, pay a fee and change companies. So if you’re not crazy about your cellphone carrier, but the issue isn’t bad enough to warrant breaking the contract, you might not actually change to a new company until the contract is up, letting you avoid early cancellation fees.

Mary Pat: What are the major advantages of smartphones over non-smartphones?

Abraham: The difference between a smartphone and a conventional mobile device is the things the device is capable of. So I'd say the biggest capabilities that a smartphones has over an older phone are:

1. Email – Constant access to your inbox. Send and reply anywhere. This is the biggest thing most business users are looking for.

2. Web/Internet/Cloud access – Web browsing, as well as browser access to company private networks, and cloud storage services.

3. Multimedia – Take pictures, sound and video from a mobile device, and access rich content through the web, for business, and personal use applications.

Mary Pat: How can smartphones help the business person?

Abraham: Smartphones help the business person by giving them critical data on the go, and giving them the ability to make critical decisions from wherever they are. A smartphone lets you connect with coworkers and customers in a faster, more efficient way that also recognizes that today's workforce is often a mobile one. Mobile technology lets you improve productivity, by giving employees the tools to get the job done from more places, and at more times.

Mary Pat: What do you think about the fact that people with smartphones might be working more (as they are always available) not less, as technology is supposed to be helping us to do?

Abraham: It is definitely a double-edged sword. Just because we can do something doesn't always mean we should. Being able to do more shouldn't be a mandate to have to do more, and as with any new technology, you have to adapt your habits to conditions on the ground. Technology won't set boundaries for you, and won't balance your work/home life just by saving you

time. So set some rules going in. If you can't take late-night emails or calls and still get sleep, then turn it off after dinner. If you find yourself feeling guilty about knowing you could be more productive, then be more productive tomorrow, but don't drive yourself crazy in your off hours because you could be answering emails. No technology is actually helping you if its power is making you miserable. Use a smartphone as a tool, not a leash.

Mary Pat: What do you think are the three best free apps (applications) and the three best paid apps for smartphones for business people?

Abraham: App markets on Apple iPhone, Google Android, and Blackberry products offer an enormous range of software tools for the business person, but that being said, here's what I couldn't go without currently.

Free Apps -

Skype (available for Android and iPhone) – The powerful Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) software that lets you make free voice and video calls to other Skype users, as well as chat and call landlines is a great free app. Some people even use Skype is the place of their mobile minutes! If you are a Skype user on your desktop or laptop, you will love having it on your phone.

Feedly (available for Android and iPhone) – a fantastic newsreader that allows you to subscribe to RSS feeds of your favorite websites and read the updates on your own time. Feedly lets mobile users read their favorite sites and blogs on their own time in an neat, organized way. Not sure what a newsreader is? **Click here to find out.**

Box.net (available for Android and iPhone) – Box.net is a powerful secure file sharing and collaboration web service that lets you access files from a secure server on your phone. More versatile and powerful than simply attaching documents to

emails, Box.net gives you access to all your critical data on the go. We love Box so much at MMP that **we built a tool with them called MMP FileConnect**, and the free Box mobile device applications let business users have access to all of their Box communications in one place.

Paid Apps-

Quickoffice (available for Android and iPhone) – A fantastic office productivity suite for Mobile Devices, QuickOffice lets you edit Documents, Spreadsheets and Presentations from a variety of file formats right on your phone. The software is so popular that some devices come with it pre-loaded. (About \$10)

Splashtop Remote Desktop (available for Android and iPhone) – Your smartphone lets you do a lot of things like you were at your desktop, but what if you needed to actually be at your computer, looking at your screen? Remote desktop software lets you set up a connection to your home or work computer and actually log in and control the mouse and keyboard just like you were there. This can help not only business people who have some applications on a PC that can't be installed on a smartphone, but also people in customer service and support, giving them the option to simply “log-in” to your computer's screen and fix things remotely. (About \$2)

Square (available for Android and iPhone) – Click on the Square link and scroll down to check out the video of the pediatrician taking payments when he makes a house call! Very cool. Square is a remarkable little program that lets you turn your mobile device into a credit card machine to take payments anywhere instantly. The program is free to download, and the company will send you a free Square “card reader” that plugs into your phone so that it can read the card's magnetic strip. Collecting money via credit card will mean that you pay a service fee to the company, but it's a tremendously low-cost way for businesses to take credit on the go. (Price: 2.75% of

the transaction.)

After hearing Abraham's advice, I bought a Droid X2 with Verizon and although I'm still adjusting to typing on the screen, I am loving it. Yep, I am a geek!

Readers, what phone are you using and what apps help you to be productive?