

Blackberry vs. iPhone

Combine a cell phone with the ability to wirelessly sync your email, contacts, and calendar, and you've got a mobile device. It may be referred to as a Smartphone (although this is so 2002), PDA, or handheld; I call them mobile devices. These devices are becoming essential business tools, no longer just toys. Our team is actually seeing more law firms scale back on laptop purchases in favor of a big-display desktop PC and a quality mobile device as functionality of such devices rapidly evolves.

With all of the choices available today, choosing a mobile device can be an overwhelming task. I will keep it simple here, focusing on two. There are four main players in the market today: BlackBerry, iPhone, Palm, and Windows Mobile.

Palm was a solid contender in its day, and I really liked my Treo 650 a few years ago, but there have been only minor changes to its platform since, and - frankly - it feels dated. Palm seems to be a dying breed (although that's what I said about Apple) as many of the wireless carriers have moved away from it. Palm has even looked to a partnership with Microsoft to put Windows Mobile on their main device, a Treo. While I think this is the best implementation of a Windows Mobile device, it's still Windows Mobile.

Windows Mobile has been around a while, and currently runs second in terms of Smartphone installed base; but I don't get it. Understand, this is coming from someone who has traditionally embraced anything Windows. The problem is in the software itself. Through each new Windows Mobile version, the issues remain; it's clunky and it's a dog. At times it's been so bad, I'd be on the phone with a client, and need to check

my calendar for availability, only to have the phone lock up. Believe me, as a technology expert, this is the last thing I want to happen! Until they fix the slowness and "clunkiness" of the software, I cannot recommend any Windows Mobile device.

Now that we have the two other options out of the way, let's get to the real players: BlackBerry and iPhone.

Before we go any further in this article, let me please clarify something. We are talking about a BlackBerry, NOT a Blueberry. Working with attorneys often as I do, I have heard it called many things besides its name. BlackBerry devices are made by the Canadian company, RIM (Research in Motion). BlackBerry started as a two-way pager in 1999, and in 2002 expanded its offering into the mobile device we know today.

One of the great things about BlackBerry is choice. Currently there are 7 models available to choose from, in varying sizes. BlackBerry devices offer best-in-class security, good one-handed ease of use, GPS, cameras, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and durability. How durable, you ask? My team and I have seen mixed results, some of which are pretty amusing. When an attorney says with a serious face, "Is my BlackBerry waterproof?" - you know you're in for an interesting story. By the way, you can't hide the fact if you do drop it in water as there are small white stickers near the battery that turn red when it's been submerged. I've heard lawyers confess they've dropped their BlackBerry in a sink, a lake, a hot tub, a dog dish, and even a toilet! Common.

BlackBerry devices are also extremely intuitive to use. For instance if I type "im" it automatically changes to "I'm." Putting a double space at the end of a sentence adds the period

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automatically. Holding down a letter makes it a capital. I could go on, but you get the idea. This is something the other devices lack.

One of the make-or-break issues for me is battery life. If I can't get through the day on a single charge, it's a deal-breaker. The BlackBerry doesn't disappoint here, as all of the Berry devices I've used to date have held a charge for the whole day, even though I'm constantly using e-mail.

I also like the fact that every Berry has a red LED that blinks red when you have a new e-mail, voicemail, text message, or missed call. That way, even with the screen off and without touching the device, I can see if I've missed something.

There are also many add-ons you can get for your Berry. BlackBerry recently released Media Sync, which allows syncing of playlists directly from iTunes at no charge. Google has some free add-ons for BlackBerry as well, like Google Maps, Gmail, and Google voice search. There's even an add-on coming that allows you to open your garage door from your Berry! Many of the legal application vendors are creating or have created clients to talk to their software for BlackBerry. For instance, WORLDOX allows you to look up

documents that are on the system when you are out of the office.

Next questions: What service options are available from the carriers? BlackBerry devices can be found from any of the four major carriers: AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint. All have different pricing based on your needs. When you get a BlackBerry, you'll choose both a voice plan and a data plan. Data plans are essentially e-mail and Internet. My recommendation is to get the unlimited data plan, because limited plans don't save much money, and if you go over your allotted usage, it becomes spendy.

With BlackBerry there are two types of data service: BIS (BlackBerry Internet Service) or BES (BlackBerry Enterprise Server). Both allows wireless sync of e-mail, contacts, and calendar. BIS, the cheaper of the two, is designed for those without a server who must rely on the carrier. This is the most common approach for firms with under five users.

BES is for five users and up. Additional functions, if your firm has an Exchange server, include syncs of Outlook notes and tasks, ability to turn on your out-of-office notice, and improved attachment viewing. Security is also vastly improved when you use a Berry in conjunction with a BES server. You can literally lock down things like the camera, text messaging, and carrier-specific applications, like one that allows you to buy ringtones. There are many other benefits to installing a BES server, so consult with your IT person if you are interested. Keep in mind the first license is free, after which they are \$99 each. In a typical environment, it will take IT about 2 hours to install a BES server assuming you have the required hardware in place.

The BlackBerry Bold is my personal favorite. It has a full keyboard, and an awesome screen. It even looks professional. Currently, Bold is an AT&T exclusive device, but other carriers will get it soon enough. If you'd rather have more of a cell phone feel, the new Pearl Flip that T-Mobile offers is a great option. I would stay away from the BlackBerry Storm, as our team has experienced some major quirks with it, and a few attorneys have eventually returned them.

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So, with all this BlackBerry praise, things were looking as though BlackBerry would dominate for years to come. Then, in walks the iPhone, and in one year, it's already positioning itself as the dominant player moving forward.

What's to like? Where do I begin? The design absolutely rocks! The interface rocks! It has all of the niceties expected in a device today, like decent camera, GPS, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and 3G (high speed wireless data). It also has a fantastic screen and good battery, not to mention an iPod built-in. What really stands out for me are three things: a rich mobile Internet experience that can't be beat, e-mail attachments that are super easy to read, and the array of applications that are available to make the iPhone even better.

Additional available applications are awesome. "Shazam" allows you to simply push a button and the software "listens" to the

music you hear ~ whether it's in your car on the radio or in a restaurant. It responds with the cover art of the song, name, and artist, and a one-click access to purchase it on iTunes. There are also terrific weather, sports, and movie apps that let you see what's playing near you. You can even watch a movie trailer. With GPS, you can do a quick Google search to find the nearest Italian restaurant. (You can do this on some Berry devices too, but it's cooler on an iPhone.) Speaking of restaurants, there's an application to make reservations. These applications help raise the iPhone from a good device, to a stellar one.

My iPhone experience didn't begin this impressively. Battery life was horrendous until I turned off push e-mail. (Push e-mail automatically and continuously "pushes" down new items from a server to a device.) Now I have mine set to sync every 15 minutes, which works fine, but it's still

not push like a BlackBerry! The keyboard definitely took me a while to get used to. Even after two months of use and away from my BlackBerry, I can still type faster on a Berry. I also miss the little red LED that tells me I have a new message waiting.

Even with the iPhone's shortcomings, I have been converted. Did it take me some time? Yes. Between getting used to the on-screen keyboard and not having a copy/paste function, it wasn't all smooth. But I love the fact that I can pull up a website and view it the way it was intended, and it's fast. I was very skeptical about dialing a phone number on the screen; I wasn't sure about how it would all look in direct sunlight; and I wondered how responsive the touch screen would be. Touch screens on many Windows Mobile devices had proven disappointingly slow. But iPhone has shown it can more than satisfy.

The cost of BlackBerry devices will vary from free to \$299 depending on the model you choose, the provider (BlackBerry devices are available from any carrier), and if you are beginning a new contract. If your current contract is up, or you are looking at a new provider or new line of service, you can get the best deal; don't expect much off if you are part way into a two-year contract. The monthly service fee is two-tiered, and varies based on the carrier. The first tier is BIS and the second is BES. The BIS cost ranges from \$19.99 per month with T-Mobile, up to \$49.99 per month for unlimited data (e-mail and Internet). BES service will run \$29.99 per month to \$49.99 per month, again, depending on the carrier. Remember that you can't just purchase e-mail without Internet, even if you don't plan on using the Internet option. You either purchase a voice-only plan, or a voice-and-data plan.

The cost of the iPhone is simpler to calculate because you only have one carrier to choose from—AT&T. An 8GB model costs \$199, and \$299 buys a 16GB model. For most, the 8GB will suffice, but if you have a ton of music, choose the 16GB. No discounts here, as we are dealing with Apple. As for service cost, it's your voice



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Bottom line, I've converted to the iPhone and so far I haven't looked back. The iPhone is the easiest phone to use to date, and this BlackBerry user is a firm believer in Apple now more than ever. I still miss my BlackBerry keyboard and the little red LED, as well as a more comprehensive sync of Microsoft Outlook, but I've sacrificed those for the convenience of an all-in-one device that is at the top of its class. 

By Jeff Alluri. Mr. Alluri is responsible for the daily operations of Element's successful IT consulting business with its focus on law firms. He was formerly the director of IT with Bassford Remele. Alluri and his team provide technology vision and budget forecasting, and many other IT services to over twenty law firm clients.
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