

At Least my Phone is Smart

I was in the right century but the wrong decade again, and I was happy there. I had a plain, old cell phone and I had a plain, old electronic calendar. But then, due to changes in the world of cell phone providers, I was required to trade phones. And I traded up in order to avoid becoming more obsolete than I already am. I became the proud owner of a BlackBerry, and in the interest of full disclosure, I should say, I'm receiving no endorsement fees for this column, though I will accept them if offered.

My BlackBerry can do everything except wash dishes. Or rather, it could if I knew how to operate it. To call it a cell phone just because I make calls with it would be like calling my computer a "typewriter" just because I type with it, or calling Thanksgiving dinner "lunch" just because I eat it at noon.

No, my BlackBerry is not just a cell phone; it is what you call a "smartphone," though apparently it's not smart enough to know that "smartphone" and "BlackBerry" should both be two words. It is a cell phone, appointment book, and entertainment center rolled into one. It is like an office in the palm of my hand--the only difference being, I can always find my office. Also I can't play Brickbreaker and Texas HoldEm there.

I can use my smartphone to read e-mails, surf the net, play games, and keep track of how much time I've wasted doing it all. If I tell my smartphone to call so and so, it will dial their number. At least, it would if I had anyone named so and so in my contact list.

It has maps, a calculator, a camera, a voice recorder--and me for the operator. And that is, as far as I can tell, the only downside. You have to be smart to operate a smartphone.

I used to make appointments by holding my phone against my ear with one hand and holding my calendar with my other hand. Now when I make an appointment, I have to take my smartphone away from my ear in order to check my calendar. Unfortunately, the person on the other end of the line can still hear me muttering, "How does this stupid thing work?" Eventually, I put the phone back to my ear and say sweetly, "I'll check my calendar and call you back--from a land line."

My smartphone has a cute little Barbie-sized keyboard for texting. Now I don't mean to brag, but I am a VERY FAST typist--if you don't deduct for errors. Unfortunately, being a fast typist does not make one a fast texter--at least not this one. Typing is to texting what house cats are to lions--same genus, different species. After decades of typing almost every day, my fingers know where the keys are on a computer keyboard. But it's my thumbs that text, and they only know where the space bar is. Plus they're not Barbie-sized.

I love that my smartphone contains all the details of my life in a package the size of a bar of soap. But I'm reminded of a movie I saw long ago in which the main character took over someone else's life after finding that person's planner--the old fashioned kind with a paper calendar and no built-in cell phone. I don't remember the name of the movie; I'm not even sure I liked it. But it haunts me these days. With all the information stored on my smartphone, someone

could easily take over my life, and they'd probably do a better job with it. At least they'd be able to operate my smartphone better than I can.

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