

Selecting a 'New' iPhone

By Gene Rubel – Digital Device Doctor

Apple is coming out with a new line of iPhones that will... Wait, Apple is always coming out with new iPhones, adding lots of new features at a heftier price. For many seniors, the introduction of new phones can represent an ideal opportunity to upgrade their current iPhones at a (relatively) bargain price by choosing an earlier model.

We always hate to compare technology to cars, but those of us of a certain age can remember how new car models – with mostly design and sheet metal changes – came out every September. The result was a clearance of last year's models. Many buyers considered last year models to be great values.

That concept hasn't changed much with iPhones. Without a doubt, each new line of phones brings a slew of new features, but unless you're a power user or getting someone else to pay for the phone, you can upgrade significantly with an old iPhone X – and get an even better value with an iPhone 8. Their prices will drop the minute the iPhone 11s hit the market, and that will increase their value. You'll still have a number of great features, such as cameras, storage and battery life, and the phone will be new enough to handle the inevitable upgrades of Apple iOS operating system. In our opinion, the value will drop lower than the prices for iPhone 7 and iPhone 6 models because their cameras, storage and battery life will be even more inadequate.

To help you better understand the differences, let's review the various lines, starting with a brief look at the iPhone 11 and working back from there.

iPhone 11

There are only rumors as of this writing about the features and costs of the three iPhone 11 models Apple is believed to be introducing. Prices reportedly will range from \$749 to \$1099. The phones will feature faster processors, multiple cameras with more editing capabilities, more charging options and multi-angle face ID. The last feature is a biometric that can eliminate the need to enter a numeric code to unlock the phone.

We're not making light of these advances in any way. It's just that in our experience, most seniors are not looking for advanced features. They're still looking for good performance with a lot of basic tasks, such as talking (remember, it's still a phone), email and texting, internet browsing and tying into a GPS capability to drive somewhere. You don't need an iPhone 11 to that well.

iPhone X

In many cases, you don't even need an iPhone X (10) to do all of those functions well. But if you have an iPhone 8 and want to upgrade, there are models that make it worth your while without going overboard on price.

The iPhone XR gets a lot of rave reviews for its value. It has the same battery life as the more expensive iPhone XS and XS Max, which had been retailing for more than \$1,000, and its Smart HDR camera takes good pictures. It comes in a variety of colors to appeal to your fashion sense. For those of you who want to get technical, it shares the same internal specs as its more expensive siblings: Apple's fast A12 Bionic chipset and a 12MP dual-lens camera with a single lens on back. Translation: You'll take good pictures and videos of your grandkids.

The only drawback for some is that is a large-screen mobile phone. While the larger screen is easier to read and gives you a better display of videos, it may be too big for your hand. If that's the case, consider the iPhone X.

The iPhone X is not cheap, but it has a brilliant screen with good technology inside, and you may find it easier to hold and use. You will need to get used to using Face ID, which takes advantage of a camera/software combination that can map your face.

With the iPhone X series, Apple eliminated the home button and the jack for a headset or charger, so be prepared to adapt to those aspects of Apple's technology.

iPhone 8

For our money – and yours, this is the best iPhone value. The technology inside the 8 and 8 Plus is only two years old, which is recent enough to ensure (in all likelihood) that it will support upgrades to Apple's iOS operating system for the next several years. That's important by itself because those upgrades include security fixes as well as performance improvements.

The difference between the 8 and 8 Plus is size. Many seniors may find the 8 easier to hold, use and carry. For all of you with previous iPhone models, you'll still find familiar operational factors such as the home button and fingerprint readers to unlock your phone. If you're upgrading from an older iPhone, you'll like features such as wireless charging and fast charging and a camera that works really well without all the bells and whistles of newer models.

With the release of the iPhone 11, you can expect prices to drop, and that will really raise the value of the iPhone 8.

iPhone 7 and 6

You can still find them, most likely as refurbished phones, and the price will be exceptionally low. But in our opinion, the value is lower than the price. The iPhone 6 debuted in 2015, and that does make it ancient by mobile phone standards. It doesn't have anywhere near the same internal technology as an iPhone 8, and the iPhone 7 isn't far behind. Even if you have an iPhone 5, we recommend leaping all the way to an iPhone 8, if not an iPhone X. Your investment will last a lot longer by doing that.

iPhone alternatives

iPhones remain popular among many seniors and their families, and that can help family members help parents and grandparents with all kinds of usage issues that crop up. It can also help tie them together with various features.

Apple fans generally like the security that comes with the company's proprietary software, but they pay a premium for it. Android-based phones use Google's operating system, which is more open for developers to add features, and the wider selection of brands and models typically results in lower prices for the same features – or more of them.

Full disclosure: I have Google Pixel phones, which use the Android system, and I like them a lot. But Apple has built a good mobile phone market share because its products work well.

Buying Your Phone

While all the phone service carriers and every retailer on earth is ready to sell you an iPhone or another brand, we recommend going to an Apple Store to buy your phone. (We make the same recommendation for other manufacturers with stores; we don't recommend going to a phone carrier's store.)

The problem with buying a phone from a carrier is that the carriers have phones customized to their networks, and that limits the phone's capabilities. In the US, for example, Verizon, Sprint, and US Cellular use CDMA technology to provide cellular service. AT&T and T-Mobile – and most of the world, for that matter – use another technology, GSM.

What it means for you is that if you buy a phone from Verizon, it's likely to have only CDMA capability. If you switch carriers, you'll need to buy a new phone. But if you buy your phone from the Apple store, your phone will be able to work with either technology. That will make it easier for you to change carriers, and it may give you more options when traveling abroad.

You have two more options in making your final selection.

The first is to decide if you want a new or refurbished phone. Refurbished phones may have a physical blemish or two, but they carry the same warranty as a new one with a lower price. You can find them online or in a store, which brings us to the second option: buying it online or in a store.

If personal assistance is important, buying in a store is a no-brainer. You can ask if a specific phone is compatible with your carrier, and you can make sure you get the right case for your phone. Store personnel can also help you back up your data and move it to your new phone – though you can always go to an Apple Store for help. Just make sure your data is backed up to your iCloud or iTunes account before you give up your old phone. If you don't need the handholding, you can find better deals and more choices of phones online.

Some other points to keep in mind when buying a new phone:

- Bring correct ID
- Make sure you're an authorized user with your carrier
- Know your carrier account information
- Back up your iPhone to iCloud – yes, it's important enough to repeat
- Know your Apple ID and password

The last two points are specific to Apple, but similar requirements may apply to any phone you buy – especially having your phone backed up. It allows you to migrate all of your contacts, photos and other data to your new phone.