

Apple iPhone

Apple's iPhone was released in the USA back in June, amid a flurry of media hype and after many months of rumour. As it is released in the UK, **Richard Kilpatrick** assesses its potential value to the freelance photographer

Slim, and weighing 135g, Apple's iPhone features fairly run of the mill specifications in an impressive package. On its release in the UK, market response was somewhat tainted by some unusual choices on Apple's part in terms of how it sold the phone.

18.02 hours on 9 Nov saw the release of the iPhone in the UK to a generally indifferent public, although the media made up for this with stories about the short supplies, queues, and semi-religious excitement that surrounded the US launch. Now the dust has settled, we have an opportunity to look at the UK iPhone properly and see how it fits into the existing marketplace, and if it offers anything for the freelance photographer.

Hardware

The iPhone's strongest selling point is its hardware. A tablet-like device which fits into any pocket comfortably, it feels astonishingly light given the solid construction. The 4.5x2.4ins device houses one primary button. The 3.5ins 480x320 display is covered by tough glass - if you're used to a typical touch screen, the iPhone is going to surprise you. It will withstand a lot of abuse, including attempts to mark it with a modelling knife (as seen on YouTube, rather than self-tested!).

The iPhone has 8GB of Flash storage, 128MB application RAM, a 400MHz ARM-based CPU, and the usual assortment of support chips, but does not support the current 3G high-bandwidth mobile data connections. Rather, it offers standard WiFi connectivity, and is marketed alongside contracts with free access to The Cloud hotspots across the UK.

When away from WiFi, you have access to O2's Edge data network (similar to ISDN in performance) currently with about 20% UK coverage, although the areas it covers are also the sort of areas with commonly available WiFi ...

Software

Compared to Windows Mobile devices, using the iPhone is a joy, despite it running on what many would consider a 'medium



spec' CPU and using Unix, which is essentially a ported version of Mac OS X. As supplied, the iPhone will only run applications as provided by Apple.

iPhone is essentially an iPod, an internet tablet, a phone, and a mobile media player. The system works together well, with the polish you would expect from an Apple product. The phone features a large on-screen keypad, one-tap access to the easily navigated editable contacts database; a simple three-button source selection to choose headset, speakerphone or iPhone audio; and exceptionally

clear audio reproduction.

It also offers 'Visual Voicemail' - a unique function whereby you can browse the messages on your answering service with full contact information, and play them back in any order. This feature alone would be of benefit to any busy photographer in situations where the handset would be unattended for long periods, such as during a wedding.

People I called using it reported that I was loud, and perhaps a little too close to the microphone, but clear. Audio quality for calls over bluetooth is equally impressive. Telephone functions extend into the threaded SMS application (like an instant messaging client) and are neatly tied in with the iPod features.

In terms of iPod functionality, the phone is basically an 8GB iPod Touch, and supports rotation, Cover Flow and playlists. Music and video playback is impressive, particularly video, which you convert and import in iTunes. It integrates with many accessories, I tried it in my car with a low-cost Ripspeed multimedia unit. It responded faster than my regular 80GB iPod, no doubt partly due to smaller playlists, but also handled acting as a phone with a Bluetooth headset admirably - an incoming call paused the music, call quality was excellent, and then the music resumed. The only failing of the iPod aspect is that smaller-capacity units will never provide the 'always have something you want' versatility of the HD-based devices.

Over a traditional iPod, the iPhone has the ability to purchase tracks from iTunes and play YouTube videos directly. Hints are that eventually the device will record and upload video to YouTube, a function that will no doubt appeal to the social-networking web user, but for those of us used to long drives, the ability to purchase a new audiobook or comedy album, for considerably less money and with a much wider selection than in the typical motorway service station, is appealing.

While listening to music, and not driving, you can use the O2 contract's inclusive data, freely available WiFi from The Cloud, or your own access point, to browse websites in Safari, access email in the user-friendly, but restrictive (no attachments apart from images from the camera) mail client, and play with