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## Wireless Web Guide

World Wide Web without Wires

November 12, 1999

### Shopping for a Wireless Web Phone

by CHRISTINA SPONSELLI

**S**o you've decided to jump on the wireless Web and now you're looking for the gadget to make it happen. Before you read our [reviews of the latest smart phones](#), here are some things to consider. And remember you need to sign up for a plan that includes [Internet access](#). You can get a feel for what's out there by [comparing wireless data plans](#).

A phone's price depends on where it is being sold. But a phone with Internet access is available in almost everyone's price range—from one hundred to eight hundred dollars. Pricing for plans with wireless Web access, also called [data service](#), vary widely.

#### When Size Does Matter

Consider the screen size ([photo](#)) and the number of text lines displayed. Being forced to scroll a dozen times to read a news story ([photo](#)) on a small screen can quickly become a drag. So when you're shopping for a phone, compare the number of lines of text on the screen display, sometimes referred to as multiline display. Also, look for a backlit screen and keys, so you can read the screen and use the keys in low-light situations.

Although most phones have a light emitting diode (LED) screen, some newer phones, such as NeoPoint's 1000 ([photo](#)), have a liquid crystal display (LCD) that is easier to read. If you're looking for something easy on your eyes, consider forking over the additional money and buying a phone with an LCD screen.

#### The Key Is the Keys

Check out the keypad ([photo](#)). What do you use to navigate through the menus—a rocker button, a navigator button, or a jog dial? Make sure the keys are conveniently located and easy to use. Some phones have a flip cover, which protects the keys from accidentally being pressed, but some of these models force you to flip open the cover to answer a call.

#### No Wires, Less Speed

Many phones with Internet access can also be used as wireless modems. But the speed is usually around 14.4 kilobits per second (Kbps)—as fast as the slowest wired [modem](#).

### Article Sections

1. [Smart Phones, Clever Features](#)
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### In Brief

- Your phone needs are different when you're accessing the Web. Consider screen size, location and size of the keys, and the ability to use it as a wireless modem.
- The phone and plan's price depend on where they are being sold. But there are Internet-ready phones for everyone's budget—from one hundred to eight hundred dollars.
- Phones with PDA functions may rely on applications that reside on the wireless network. Consider these phones carefully, because if you're roaming or otherwise off the network, you can't access the PDA features.

Decide before buying the phone if you might be using it as a modem. Ask if you need to buy additional cables to hook up the phone to your computer and what software you need to install on your computer. And remember you're paying for the [airtime](#) while you're using your wireless modem.

### **Phone + Internet Access + PDA = Very Smart Phone**

If you're shopping for a phone with Internet access and razzle-dazzle, consider a phone with personal digital assistant ([photo](#)) ([PDA](#)) functions—such as a schedule, to-do list, and contacts.

Hunt for a phone that has the memory and applications on the phone, not your wireless [service providers'](#) network. If applications—such as your schedule—are on the network, you don't have access to them when you're [roaming](#) or otherwise off your service provider's network. Phones with the applications on them include the NeoPoint 1000 and Nokia's 7100 series, according to Andrew Seybold, wireless data consultant.

"The NeoPoint 1000 has 160K of memory—enough for 1000 contacts," said Sanford Weisman, NeoPoint's senior vice president of sales and marketing. The memory cannot be upgraded.

Finding out if a phone hosts the applications and has memory is tricky. Try calling the phone manufacturer's customer service number and speaking to a representative specializing in wireless Internet access.

And remember, spending several hundred dollars on a fancy phone doesn't make good sense if you don't know how to use the phone. "It isn't important what your phone can do, but what the phone can do easily and effectively," said Weisman.

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[Christina Sponselli](#) is editorial manager at Decide.com. Before joining the telecom corps, she worked as a Web producer and journalist. Her writing has been published in Health, Parenting, and Mother Jones magazines.

If you look in her Yak Pak you'll find a Motorola StarTAC—dual mode so she can use it at her home on the west side of California's coastal range. But, if you pass her in the halls, you'll often hear her grumbling about the spotty wireless coverage on the other side of the hill.

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