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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2008

[TECHNOLOGY]

Google's G1:
Better than the iPhone?

The G1 combines a QWERTY keyboard with full touch-screen functionality and an impressive mobile Web experience

BY JAY DOUGHERTY
DPA, WASHINGTON

Google's entry into the cellphone market is no longer a rumor. The company's new G1 phone, unveiled this week, will go head-to-head with Apple's iPhone in an effort to capture part of the market in cutting-edge "app" phones — wireless phones that marry standard wireless telephony with data-driven applications.

But the G1 won't be the best wireless phone for everyone. While the G1 is clearly a direct competitor of the iPhone — in terms of looks, feature set, and price — it's a departure from the iPhone in significant ways. Here's what you'll get.

APPS

The G1 is designed almost from the ground up to run applications — Google's apps and those created by third-party developers. Of course, Google will have the lion's share of applications ready upon the phone's release — everything from Gmail to Google Maps to the growing number of office applications that Google offers in its Google Docs suite of programs.

Accordingly, the G1 comes with a keyboard — with traditional key locations — that's larger than just about any other keyboard supplied on a wireless phone today. The slide-out keyboard is hidden under the phone's LCD when not in use. The keyboard will come as a pleasant surprise to those who have never quite grown accustomed to "virtual" keyboards provided on some phone, such as Apple's iPhone.

That keyboard could be put to good use by what very well may be the biggest news about the G1 — its open source operating system, dubbed Android, for which any developer with the necessary know-how can write applications. Contrast this with Apple's typically proprietary approach with its iPhone operating system, and you just might be tempted to recall the thumping that Apple received from IBM-compatible computers many years ago when Apple insisted on keeping third parties from developing hardware and software that were compatible with its computers.

Google's approach with Android will undoubtedly result in a flood of applications for its new G1. The downside is that, because Google has little control over third-party developers, the quality of those applications will be variable. Nevertheless, those who already use Google's current applications will be pleased to see how well they operate on the G1. Google Maps on the G1, for example, is a wonder to behold. Making use of Google Maps' Street View — which provides real-world, street-level views of your surroundings — makes finding your way to a destination particularly easy.

ERGONOMICS AND FEATURES

While the G1's focus on applications suggests a device made for keyboard mavens, fans of touch screens won't be disappointed. The G1's LCD is a touch-screen that you can use to navigate and use many applications. The keyboard is often entirely optional.

In terms of design, the G1 is comparable in size to Apple's iPhone — although the G1 is a bit taller and thicker. The G1 feels arguably a bit flimsier than the iPhone, more plasticky. The Android interface is contemporary-looking and attractive — much more like a miniature Windows-style desktop than the iPhone's unique, highly tactile interface that seeks to become an extension of your natural ability to select drag, and adjust things with your hands.

Like the iPhone, the G1 offers a full array of features that one expects of a cutting-edge wireless phone today: Wi-Fi, a Web browser, music player, integrated digital camera, games, numerous applications, GPS, and e-mail. The G1's digital camera, notably, is 3.2 megapixels, while the iPhone's is only 2 megapixels.

There are areas in which the G1 simply does not provide as much as the iPhone, however. The G1's battery life, unfortunately, is only about 130 hours standby, while the iPhone's is 300 hours, and base memory of the G1 is 1GB, while the iPhone's is 8GB. The G1's memory can be expanded to 8GB, while the iPhone's can be expanded to 16GB. The G1 also does not have streaming video capabilities, unlike the iPhone, although you can get YouTube on the G1.

The G1 also has no PC synchronizing capability. Instead, Google expects you to synchronize your contacts and calendars through the Web. This will be a major shortcoming to those who are tied to Microsoft Exchange servers — that is, the Outlook e-mail and contact management program — at work. Apple's iPhone, by contrast, is capable of synchronizing with Outlook, with the addition of a free software update. G1 users can synchronize with Google's own e-mail service, Gmail, but frankly there are not many offices that rely upon Gmail as a primary e-mail carrier.

Oddly, the G1 also lacks a headphone jack. Instead, you'll need to use the single USB jack on the phone to plug in either a special USB headset or enlist the help of a USB to 3.5mm adapter in order to use conventional headphones. To make matters worse, the G1's only USB port is also used for power, audio, and USB syncing. Needless to say, the G1 won't be a plug-and-play replacement for your iPod or other mobile media player.

CONCLUSION

The G1's seamless tie-ins with Google's growing number of applications and its open source operating system will endear the phone to those already tied to Google applications. It will also be appealing to technophiles who enjoy trying out multiple add-ons and want to have at their disposal a potentially wider array of applications. On the other hand, opening up the G1 to coders around the world means that quality control may be an issue — and that the user ultimately experience could suffer. The G1, in short, will appeal to gadget freaks and technology warriors. Those who want a product that just works might want to place their bets on Apple's tightly-controlled iPhone.

Let the battle begin: Google's G1, right, and Apple's iPhone.

PHOTOS: AFP AND AP



Pastiche and parody: burlesque is back

While New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg crusades to make New York the safest, most smoke-free, fat-free, clean-living place on Earth, a downtown burlesque show begs to differ

BY SEBASTIAN SMITH
AFP, NEW YORK

All you know for sure about Murray Hill is that his name is probably not Murray Hill — oh, and that he may not be a he.

At New York's oldest surviving burlesque show there is little point in feeling sure about anything.

The lights are dim, the wasp-waisted cocktail glasses brimming, and the orientation, even gender, of performers and the few dozen guests crammed into the tiny theater open to speculation.

"Showbiz!" exclaims master of ceremonies Hill in a suspiciously high voice.

Angie Pontani, the Bedazzled Brooklyn Bombshell, takes the stage, just three leaf-sized pieces of cloth and a sprinkling of body glitter between her and a violation of New York's anti-nudity laws.

Everyone cheers at the bawdy dancing. Even a pair of rather somber transgender men, decked up in evening dresses and chunky necklaces, tap their slipped feet.

Spotting a couple of canoodling ladies in the corner, Hill laughs: "The lesbians — they're having asthma attacks right now!"

Burlesque, mixing comedy, exotica, erotica and musicals, was a huge hit in US urban culture at the turn of the 20th century.

Eclipsed by the 1960s sexual revolution and the triumph of mass entertainment, the genre died out or was replaced by outright striptease.

Today burlesque is back in major cities as audiences rebel against an increasingly homogenized, commercialized society.

Hill's following is so strong that there is talk of moving his show up to Broadway and the big time.

For now, his troupe performs in a secretive upstairs room at Corio's restaurant in the trendy Village neighborhood, far from the regular tourist beat.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, building on the work of his predecessor Rudolph Giuliani, has embarked on a crusade to make New York the safest, most smoke-free, fat-free, clean-living place on Earth.

But the atmosphere at Corio's recalls an edgier time.

While this is not exactly strip, the Pontani sisters are soon separated from their clothes. Peekaboo Pontani could whip up froth on a cappuccino at the speed her nipple tassels twirl from otherwise bare breasts.

Neither is this theater — the red curtains are fakes stapled to the wall — but Angie Pontani does a good impression of an oyster having outrageous fun with a

basketball-sized pearl.

And for all the chorus-girl numbers, complete with high-kicks, tap-dancing, red bodices, feather headdresses and a raucous rendition of Frank Sinatra's *New York, New York*, this is definitely not Broadway.

Performers said after the show that their niche is growing rapidly.

Many were in New York to attend a three-day festival awarding Golden Pasties in categories such as "biggest diva," "classiest dame," "biggest media whore," and "most likely to go gay in 2009."

"A decade ago you could have put all of us burlesque performers into one taxi cab," said Rosa 151, showing

off glossy lips, big white teeth and big equally pearly cleavage. "Now it's spreading across the States. An American art form is making a comeback."

The charm of burlesque for performers, explained Rosa 151, is that women of all shapes and sizes are welcome. "There aren't enough parts in the theater world for women who aren't super skinny or who don't look exactly like each other," she said.

Another performer, Bette Noire of the Salome Cabaret, said burlesque was developing more slowly in her home state of Tennessee, deep in the socially conservative Bible Belt.

"They're starting to realize that it's not completely sordid and debauched," she said, then giggled: "Well, it is debauched of course, but there's joy too!"

Producer Chase Tyler said he was working to take burlesque from Off Broadway right to Times Square, navel point of Broadway's Great White Way.

He said there would be high demand, particularly from foreign tourists, but he acknowledged the pitfalls in pulling burlesque from out of the shadows and into the neon-lit capital of commercial entertainment.

"You need to bring Broadway production values, uptown production, to downtown humor," he said. "We just need to make sure we can bring this to a larger audience without compromising what it is."

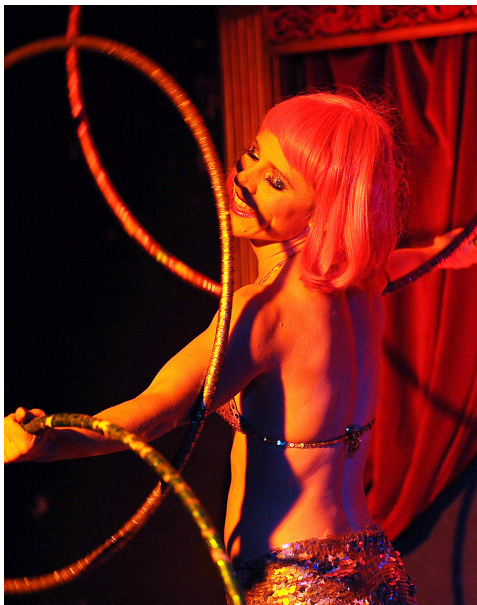
Caprice Bellefleur, the more talkative of two transvestites in evening dresses, said burlesque would continue to thrive in New York whatever form it took. "Look at us," Bellefleur said, pointing to partner Tawdry Heartburn.

"We're as different as they come and there's plenty of room for us. If there's one place in the world that celebrates diversity then it's New York."



Miss Saturn (Jennifer McGowen), left, and Peekaboo (Angie) Pontani, above, go through their routines at the Sixth Annual New York Burlesque Festival on Sept. 18, 2008, at the Corio Supper Club in New York.

PHOTOS: AFP



Left: Host Murray Hill announces the next act at the Sixth Annual New York Burlesque Festival on Sept. 18, 2008, at the Corio Supper Club in New York.

PHOTO: AFP