

Whether you're just making the jump to cell phones or if you're looking for a new cell phone, the choices can be daunting. There are so many to choose from and so many variables to take into account including functionality, look and feel, rates, etc. Here are some tips on what you should consider...

Step 1 The first thing you'll need to consider is the main purpose of the phone. Are you planning to use it mainly for calling purposes? Will it be used for business where you'll need email capabilities? How important are multimedia capabilities? Do you want to play games on it? You need to start asking yourself these kinds of questions so that you can start looking in the right category of phones.

Step 2 If you're just using it for calling purposes, then just about any phone will do and you might as well try to get one that looks good. There should be a lot of phones out there that you can get for "free" with a signed contract.

Step 3 The look and feel (or form factor) may be an important consideration since you'll need to consider how you'll be carrying this thing around (e.g., in your pocket, purse, etc.). Some people like the flip-open phones, in part because it results in an overall smaller phone (at least in length). Others like the straight candy-bar type phones.

Step

4

In terms of functionality, do you want to be able to take pictures? Keep in mind that pictures from a cell phone (at least for the cheap phones) will only be good for posting on a web page or delivery over email. They will NOT be good for printing. You'll need to check to determine how many megapixels that phone's camera offers (obviously megapixels aren't the only determining factor, but it's the most significant) – a 1-2 megapixel phone should still be able to give decent (not great) printed pictures.

Step

5

If you'd like multimedia capabilities, then you'll need to consider the specific features you're after including playing music (e.g., mp3 player), movies, and viewing photos. Try to get a phone that gives you enough storage possibilities including the use of external memory cards. The more storage capabilities you have, the happier you'll be. Storage capabilities in the 1 GB+ area should be OK, but the more the better. Make sure you play around with the user interface for these features so that you feel comfortable. You want an interface that is easy to use and clear.

Step

6

How about games? Would you like to be able to play some decent games on your phone? I could think of a hundred different times when I've had 5-10 minutes (or longer) to spare waiting for someone or something to happen (e.g., waiting in a movie line, waiting for the subway, on the subway, waiting at the airport, etc.).

Step

7

If you plan to use it for business, then you'll likely want one of these so-called "smartphones." And even if you're just using for personal needs, you may still want to consider these as they can provide the aforementioned multimedia and game-playing capabilities much better. Example phones in this category include those from Blackberry, Apple (iPhone), Samsung, etc. Think

carefully about the features and the look and feel before you buy. Some have keypads and some have touch screens, and others use combinations. Some also have tactile feedback (vibrations) to indicate when you've pressed a key or some other action has occurred. In any case, you'll definitely want to try these out before you buy.

Step

8

Ask the carrier (e.g., Sprint, AT&T, Verizon, etc.) about their coverage area. Make sure that the carrier covers areas that you intend to make most of your calls. Be reasonable though. No carrier will be able to cover every single area that you'll ever be in.

Step

9

Finally, spend some quality time thinking of the monthly rates and the contract length. A 1-2 year contract is usually considered normal. Don't sign contracts longer than this as technology and pricing strategies move at a rapid pace. You may find yourself longing for better phones or better rates during your contract period. Do some comparisons among various carriers to see what the differences are between the costs of voice and data (e.g., email and internet) features. Try to get the most hours (if not unlimited) as you can without breaking your bank. And ask for flexibility concerning any changes to your plans. Ask what the fees are (if any) for making changes.