

In this article I will compare the Blackberry Storm with the Motorola Droid. Of course, it is unfair to compare these two phones because they are very different devices, and in most measurable ways, the Droid is far superior to the Storm. This comparison is not intended as a means of determining which is the superior phone... rather, it is intended to compare these two phones strong and weak points, with the hope of accurately identifying what each phone does well and what each phone does poorly. The fact is, there are features on the Storm that the Droid could benefit from and of course, the reverse is also true. Our examination here will begin with the Blackberry Storm.

THE BLACKBERRY STORM

The Storm under evaluation was an original (not a Storm 2) and was my second. The first Storm failed when the screen developed a dark spot on the lower right hand portion. It was replaced under warranty.

The Storm operates under its own proprietary OS and is capable of being synced with Outlook when used in conjunction with the included desktop sync and file management software. This feature makes it very desirable as a business machine. It can also be set up to have email from various accounts pushed to the device, including accounts from Yahoo, Google and Hotmail. Emails received on these accounts pop up instantly on the device, keeping the owner constantly in touch with critical contacts. A robust Facebook and Skype utilities are also available, making communication in those venues equally quick and seamless.

The Storm comes with basic critical utilities... Contacts, Calendar, Notepad and To-Do List. Other softwares are available for the Storm but are limited in number and I found there really weren't any available that worked to my satisfaction. Also, there are virtually no games on the Storm... the two included are "lack luster" in my opinion. This is not a major issue for me, as I don't use my phones as toys, but it would have been nice to have something generic like solitaire included for those rare occasions when I might want to simply pass some time.

The Blackberry has a media player that can play .wav & .mp3's as well as .avi video. The media player allows for setting up play lists and the included 8gig memory card provides significant storage space for media files. Media functions are secondary for me because I use my phone primarily as a business tool but it is nice to have none the less, and they work fine for my purposes.

The Blackberry has a 3.1mp digital camera that also takes video. This camera takes very high quality photos and the video is also of reasonably good quality.

The Blackberry screen is bright and offers vivid color and image quality, It also supports a unique "spring recoil" feel on the virtual keyboard. It took a little getting used to but over just a little time I came to really like the feel of the keys and considered this feature a real plus.

As the phone is rotated, the screen automatically reorients from portrait to landscape and back to port rate again. The rotation is sometimes sluggish and I also found that as my phone aged, I sometimes had to shake it to get the screen to orientate properly.

Other things I really liked about the Storm were features like the ability to control the system font size. This is nice for "more mature" users who might find the default setting a little too small to see comfortably. This feature alone opens up the practical functionality of this device to a wider demographic.

All these good qualities aside, there is a dark side to the Storm. The most significant problem by far was stability for me. I found my Storm would lock up often... sometimes several times a day. The only cure was to reboot the phone, a process that required removing the back and removing the battery, and then reassembling the phone. After performing that action, it would take a full five minutes for the software to re-initialize. That five minutes felt like an eternity when the phone would lock up during an important phone call! Occasionally more than one reboots were required to get the phone operational as well, all at a full five minutes each! (Imagine this problem while driving... yes... it happened)!

Another issue with the Storm was its internet speed. In this 3 & 4G world, I was very disappointed to find the Storm is NOT a 3G phone. What that means is painfully slow net connections and web browsing, and when I say painfully slow, I'm talking no better than a really bad dial-up connection would be. And if you add in an occasional reboot to your web browsing experience, you pretty much do nothing more than check email... anything else is just too frustrating. (So I pay for that full data package why)?

As mentioned before, extra applications exist for the Storm but the ones I wanted... Google Earth for example, or even a good compass utility, were either not available or were paid applications. Given the instability of the phone overall, adding apps from the diminutive selection seemed pretty much a waste for me anyway, so generally I wouldn't bother. One exception was Documents To Go, which allows you to create, view and edit Word docs and Excel sheets. I found though, that the Word doc utility was more of an approximation of what a word doc should be than something I could really edit and format.

Another irritation was keeping my Storm's screen locked. The unlock button seemed to be strategically located such that it could be jostled in the pocket and activated... causing mayhem with unplanned calls, accidental texts and the like!

I mentioned earlier that I had two Storms and both died at an unnaturally young age... both in under a year of service. The first developed a mysterious dark spot at the lower right corner of the screen covering perhaps a square inch of space... a lot of real estate for a small screen. It was replaced under warranty. The replacement had the same stability issues as the first and eventually was retired when the spring recoil function started sticking, reducing texting to a new high in frustrating experiences.

After the death of my second Storm I decided to try something new... an actual 3G phone and a deviation from the "business phone" style I was accustomed to... the Motorola Droid! My response to that phone has been Wow and Wow. The first "wow" is for all the good things I like about the phone and the second "wow" is for all the bone headed screw-ups in this phone's design!

THE MOTOROLA DROID

My first impressions of the Motorola Droid were "Wow"! The First wow was the speed of 3G verses the speed of... well, not 3G... like with the Storm. All of a sudden my browser became practical to use for something other than Email! After using the phone for a while though, I have noticed that browser speed does vary anywhere from the speed of light to speeds rivaling those of the Storm. Overall though, the 3G has made browsing by phone practical and fun as opposed to tedious and maddening, which were my regular experiences with the Storm.

The Second "Wow" was with reference to maps and navigation capabilities. Tied to the browser, I can now get lost somewhere, do a voice search for my destination, map that destination and then get turn by turn directions... all within seconds! Its absolutely amazing and I've found this one feature is used

almost more than any other. I absolutely love it!

The next “Wow” was regarding additional apps. My Droid is now a notepad, a voice recorder, a calculator, a guitar tuner, a tip calculator, a stopwatch, a countdown timer, a unit converter, a magnifying glass, a guitar, a world exploring device (Google Earth), a compass, a GPS, a weather station, a news stand, a first aid station, a coupon book, a barcode reader, a satellite locator and a language translator... oh yes... it also makes a fine phone too! These applications all represent just a fraction of what's available and every one of them was free!

There were some “wow's” of a less desirable nature though, some of which nearly had me ready to delegate my nifty new toy to a dismal future as a door stop!

The biggest and baddest “wow” was what I suspect is a physical design flaw with the phone. I have discovered that when I pull the USB charging cord out of the phone in any angle other than exactly 90 degrees out and away from the phone, I run the risk of tweaking something internal in the vicinity of the charging port, breaking electrical contact and rendering it impossible to power up the phone! I have not dismantled the phone to verify my suspicions but based on my observations, I believe removing the USB plug at an angle breaks the circuit board or otherwise causes a separation in the power connection. I was able to restore the connection by beating the phone violently against the steering wheel of my car. I theorize a cracked and misaligned circuit board was probably snapped back in place by the shock of the blunt force trauma. Once I beat my Droid into submission and got it to power back up again I used extreme care in plugging and unplugging the device and have never had a repeat of the power issue. Subsequent research has revealed this problem was not unique to my phone and that many other Droid owners have experienced similar problems, thus confirming my suspicion of a serious design flaw with this phone.

Other disappointing “wow's” include the 5MP camera. My Storm sported a 3.1MP camera that took clear, sharp photos with vivid color. The Droid's 5MP camera was a huge disappointment. The photos are dark, grainy and very low quality. They pale in comparison to those produced by the Storm and are so “average” that had I known, I may have reconsidered purchasing this phone.

Another oddity I noticed relating to the camera is that photos show up in the gallery pretty much when the phone decides to put them there. For the life of me, I can't figure out why this is but if you snap a photo and then look for it in the gallery, you usually won't find it. The strange thing is you will find it in the camera utility and it will eventually migrate to the gallery... I just can't find any rhyme or reason for how and when that happens!

Also disappointing were the email, contact and calendar functions. The Storm is King in all these departments. With the Droid, transferring my Outlook calendar and contacts was a monumental task requiring I open a new Gmail account and transferring all my data there. I don't like the idea of intrusting EVERYTHING in Outlook to an outside source and while I can still sync my calendar with Outlook (through the Gmail portal), my contacts will NOT sync. Seeing my phone is the most up to date record I keep, it and Gmail contacts are nicely synced but my Outlook contacts are no longer current. This ultimately means I will be using Outlook less, which I am a bit nervous about.

As I mentioned, the Storm is far superior in the email department, pushing all new emails seamlessly to my phone without a second thought. Not so with the Droid. Gmail is pushed right to the phone as it comes in but all other accounts are pulled to the phone either manually or at intervals I set. This doesn't sound so bad but there is another little problem... spam! On my Storm, I only got mail that was sent to

my inbox, which is exactly what I wanted. With the Droid I got my inbox PLUS my spam folder. This added about 75% to the number of emails and “woe was me” if I didn't check my email for an eight hour period because the number of spam mails in that amount of time was substantial! Fortunately I was able to go into my Yahoo settings and instruct it to stop “POPping” spam. An easy fix, you might say, and it was. My point is that it wasn't necessary with my Storm.

Yet another unfortunate “wow” was the lack of a note pad, To-Do list or voice memo recorder. I was able to find all these free but that the Android designers neglected to build them into the system was very disappointing.

Despite these problems, still more positives seem to be coming up with my Droid. Voice search and voice typing for documents and texts can be such a time saver. The ability to tell the phone to send selected callers directly to voice mail is such a help when “some” people you just can't talk with right now for whatever reason may be calling at the same time others you need to talk to are placing calls.

No doubt more and more positive (and negative) features of the Droid will present themselves but these are the ones that have been most obvious over my first month or so of ownership. Given the serious strengths and flaws of both these phones, the obvious question is “which is best”? The answer of course, depends on the needs of the user but in my opinion, based on my experience with both phones, the Droid is far superior and while it is not only imperfect, but down right disappointing in some areas, its strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. Consequently the Droid is it for me. My only question now is... will the Incredible, the Droid X or perhaps the new iPhone carry on the strengths and overcome the failures of the Storm and Droid? I guess we'll see!