

Shop Smart When Buying Your First Smart Phone

Overwhelmed by smartphone options? Use these tips to ease the way.

- **Prioritize the features you want**
 - Does screen size matter? Vision challenges can be reduced with a bigger screen.
 - Want to take quality pictures? Some models will enable you to shoot like a pro.
 - How about battery life and data storage? Your ability to fully use other features may be impeded if there isn't sufficient storage or the phone has to be charged frequently.

- **Do you want an iPhone or Android operating system ("OS")?**
 - The OS for Androids was initially designed by Google, but a variety of manufacturers have adapted the OS to provide customized features and lower costs.
 - The OS used in iPhones is used only by Apple and is known for its ease of use, greater security, and better integration with other Apple products.

- **Should you buy from your carrier or from a retailer?**
 - Retailers sell "unlocked phones" that can then be used with any mobile phone service. You will pay more for the phone (especially if you want the latest model), but you may also be able to pick a carrier that offers cheaper or shorter contracts or doesn't require a contract at all. You also won't need to switch phones if you switch carriers.
 - If you get your phone from a carrier, the initial cost of the phone is usually cheaper but you will probably have to sign a contract for 1-2 years and may have to pay a termination fee if you want to switch carriers.
 - Some carriers also reduce phone prices and offer more frequent upgrades if you "rent" your phone instead of buying it. If you want to switch carriers, you will have to return the rented phone and get a new one.

- **Research carriers** – Most carriers offer a variety of payment plans and contracts. Take time to review all options to pick a plan that's right for you.
 - While every carrier claims great service, service coverage does vary. Talk with neighbors and friends about the quality of service they get where you live and travel.

- Smart phones allow you to access the internet wherever wi-fi is available. If you want continuous internet access, however, you will need to increase the size of your “data plan” and pay a larger monthly fee. Most carriers allow you to change from one data plan to another at no extra cost but be sure to ask for details.
- **Look online and in stores before you buy**
 - Look at website reviews, and carrier and retail online offers to research phone options and price plans. Keep notes so that you can compare online and retail prices.
 - Visit a retailer or carrier store to look at the phones themselves. The size and weight of phones can vary greatly. Look at the keyboard, address book and various websites to see how the screen space is used. Ask questions but be wary of high pressure sales.
 - Always check the return policies and warranties prior to purchasing. Does the seller replace the phone if its broken or lost, and at what cost?

For Consumer Information or Assistance - Call the Howard County Office of Consumer Protection (OCP). at 410-313-6420 or visit our website at:

www.howardcountymd.gov/consumer.

To obtain this factsheet in an alternative format, please contact the Office of Consumer Protection at 410-313-6420 (voice/relay) or email us at consumer@howardcountymd.gov