

# The Forgotten Sidekick

December 11, 2008

[Original link](#)

---

It's been a frustrating year for us Sidekick users. It seems like every television show, periodical, and man in the street is raving about the amazing world-changing capabilities of the iPhone (and, to a lesser extent, the Google Phone). How having a device that can conveniently surf the Web, answer email, run third-party applications and fit in your pocket is [as big a technological breakthrough as hovercars](#).

Which is infuriating to those of us who have been using a superior device for the past five years.

From the very first demo of the iPhone, it was obvious it was a knockoff of the Sidekick. The UI demo Steve Jobs did — calling two people and then merging the calls — is the exact same demo I'd given to all my friends to show off the incredible UI polish and attention to detail by the Sidekick developers. Sure, there were some differences — most notably that Apple's artists had prettied up the iPhone UI as compared to the 8-bit basement wackos who drew up the Sidekick's — but it was clear that this was an evolutionary change, not the revolutionary leap everyone made it out to be.

And, when I bought an iPhone, it became clear it wasn't even an improvement. The touch-keyboard made it impossible to type anything at length (I regularly composed whole articles on my Sidekick), the lack of multitasking made it impossible to queue up articles in the Web browser and read them on the subway (I read several books on the Sidekick), instant messages weren't even supported, and the swipe-to-scroll method quickly grew tiresome. Within a couple weeks, I sold the phone to a friend (although not before getting an outrageous roaming bill from AT&T because the iPhone couldn't keep its mouth shut).

For those two weeks, though, I was repeatedly stopped and gawked at by well-dressed people in airports and trains. They all wanted to know “Is that the iPhone?” and “How is it?” By contrast, those people, when they saw me using the Sidekick, assumed it was a videogame device.

But it wasn't as if the Sidekick was unheard of. As soon as I wandered out of the land of white folks in suits-and-ties, black and latino kids would rush up to me and gab about the Sidekick. During one trip, a latina middle-schooler stopped me on the sidewalk and asked if I'd gotten the latest firmware update yet. “It has JavaScript support!” she enthused. Browsing the Sidekick user forums bore this out — it was all black and latino schoolchildren.

But, of course, neither minorities nor schoolchildren rule the world, so the Sidekick has been written out of history. 2007 was the first time anyone had thought

to give a smartphone a decent UI, or a web browser, or an over-the-air application store. Well, at least it was the first time anyone thought to tell white people.