

The iPhone 4 & its Challengers

Apple's iPhone 4 comes with some enticing offers and freebies from the participating service providers, but are they truly worth it or just an eyewash? **Karan Bajaj & Hitesh Raj Bhagat** would like to point out the fine print with these offers and also suggest that you look beyond the iPhone at some very worthy competitors

Dual Cameras

The front VGA camera enables FaceTime, Apple's video chat application. The rear 5MP camera can also record videos in 720p.

Apps

The one thing that allows the iPhone 4 to stand strong in the face of increased competition is the quality of the app ecosystem. Despite Android's growing numbers, Apple's App Store still ranks higher overall.

Hardware

Powered by a 1GHz single core processor, 512MB RAM and either 16 or 32GB storage, though specifications on paper are not the iPhone's strong point. An oddity is the use of micro SIM cards, so far only used by Apple.



Retina Display

Even though the 3.5-inch screen is now small compared to some of the competition, the 960 x 640 pixel resolution is still the highest. It's called the Retina Display because it can display more pixels than the eye can see!

iOS 4.3

The latest version of iOS (a free update) enables various new features like Wi-Fi personal hotspot, iTunes Home Sharing (allows you to play contents of your iTunes library on your iPhone over Wi-Fi) and enhanced performance.

Apple iPhone 4

After a long wait of almost a year, the iPhone 4 is now officially available in India through Airtel and Aircel. One of the reasons why the iPhone has been so successful (and why the launch of the iPhone has always been delayed in India) is operator subsidy. In the west, you can get your choice of phone (including the iPhone) for considerably less than the sticker price, simply by signing on for a contract. Under the terms of the contract, you agree to pay a higher-than-normal rental and you'll get a phone locked to that particular operator's network.

UNIQUE REVERSE SUBSIDY PLANS

In India, where quick money can be made by illegally unlocking a phone, the operators had to come up with something new.

Enter the reverse subsidy model: Under these new schemes for the iPhone 4, you pay the full price of the phone upfront — ₹34,500 for 16GB and ₹40,900 for 32GB — and you get unlocked phones. However, instead of subsidizing the cost of the device, Airtel and Aircel will give you hefty discounts on your monthly bill, just to make sure that you stick with them.

AIRCEL'S FINE PRINT

With Aircel, you pay only ₹399 for a ₹1,119 plan and ₹800 for a ₹2,510 plan. The premium plans save you the cost of the phone in two years while basic plans give back 60% of the phone's cost.

You cannot use the same offer on any other phone (or any oth-

er iPhone). The SIM has to be registered with one device, and the tariff plan is applicable for that particular device only.

Finally, the plans are valid only for two years. iPhone 4 users will get a special bill, which will mention the rental and payback amounts separately.

AIRTEL'S FINE PRINT

Airtel plans start at ₹300 and go up to ₹1,000 per month. The free minutes offered by Airtel under these plans are A2A (Airtel to Airtel) only. You will be charged at 50p/min to call other numbers. The free SMS included is only applicable for local cell-phone numbers (within the same circle). Any other SMS will be charged at the usual rates (₹1 per SMS within India, ₹5 each for international SMS).

THE VERDICT

Of the two, Aircel's plans are a far better deal. However, even these plans will benefit only a small section of power users.

OTHER OPERATORS

While other operators like Vodafone and Idea don't offer any reverse subsidy plans yet, you can always use these networks with any iPhone 4 officially purchased in India.

INCREASING COMPETITION

With the latest dual core onslaught, the iPhone 4 can't compete in terms of hardware specifications. For those who don't mind looking at Android, there are devices with far more features and larger screens available at a lower cost (see below).