

4 Reasons It's Smart to Buy a Used Cell Phone

The benefits of a pre-owned phone go beyond its affordability.

[Kelsey Sheehy](#) February 21, 2018

Shante Wilkerson bought her first used phone in 2016, and she'll never go back to buying new.

"I can't justify it financially," she says. "If a new phone isn't free, I don't get it."

But carriers no longer hand out free phones in exchange for a two-year contract. Instead, customers now pay the full retail price — anywhere from \$700 to \$1,000 for the latest smartphone — in monthly installments over 18 to 24 months. You're not locked into a contract like before, but you still need to pay the remaining balance on your phone if you cancel your service.

That's a lot of money. Buying a used phone can cut your device costs in half, but the appeal of [purchasing a pre-owned phone](#) goes beyond price.

The benefits of buying used

1. You save big. A used Samsung Galaxy S7 currently sells for as little as \$149 on Swappa, an online marketplace for used phones. That's a price cut of more than \$300 off the retail cost of \$480. Your used phone may come with a few dings and scratches, but your savings will easily cover the cost of a case to hide those imperfections.

2. You get more storage for less. [New iPhones](#) offer a standard 32GB of storage, and you'll have to shell out an extra \$100 to bump up to 128GB. That's not the case with pre-owned phones. A 128GB iPhone 7 on Gazelle, an online marketplace for used electronics, is currently only \$40 to \$50 more than the 32GB version being sold there.

"Purchasing a secondhand phone is a small step to reducing the flow of e-waste."

3. You help the environment. Americans generate millions of tons of electronic waste every year, a large chunk of which is old cell phones. Those phones pile up in landfills in the U.S. and overseas, where they seep harmful chemicals into the soil, water and air. Purchasing a secondhand phone is a small step to reducing the flow of e-waste.

“By buying used, you’re giving second life to a device,” says Chase Freeman, a spokesperson for ecoATM Gazelle, which includes the online marketplace and physical kiosks to sell phones for cash. “And you’re keeping it out of a landfill, where it can harm the environment.”

4. You don’t sweat the cracked screen (as much). Kids now get their first smartphone as early as age 10, and the odds of your fifth-grader dropping that new smartphone are high. You can minimize your potential losses by getting your child (or a clumsy adult) a gently used phone.

» READ: [Best family cell phone plans](#)

When to buy new

Used smartphones are almost always the cheaper option, but there are a few reasons to consider buying a new device.

A promotion is too good to pass up. Major carriers often run promotions that offer steep discounts, including buy one smartphone, get one free. Deals like these can be hard to pass up, especially if the cost of two new phones is less than one used model.

You want a longer life cycle for your phone. Cell phones, like computers and other electronics, have a limited life span. When you buy a new phone, you get it at the start of its life cycle, says George Koroneos, a spokesperson for Verizon Wireless.

“There are things I buy secondhand, like guitars,” Koroneos says. “But computers, things that have an end date, that’s when I’d rather have something new to get the most out of the life of it.”

That said, many used phones still have a lot of juice left in them. You just need to [ask the right questions](#) to assess its condition before you buy.

About the author: Kelsey is a personal finance writer at NerdWallet. Her work has been featured by The New York Times, USA Today, CBS News and The Associated Press. [Read more](#)

Best smartphones 2019: The top mobile phones available to buy today

- Samsung Galaxy S10+ Samsung Galaxy S10+ deals. ...
- Apple iPhone XS Max. Apple iPhone XS Max deals. ...
- OnePlus 7 Pro. OnePlus 7 Pro 6GB 128GB deals. ...
- Xiaomi Mi 9. Xiaomi Mi 9 deals. ...
- Samsung Galaxy S10e. ...
- Oppo Reno 10x Zoom. ...
- Motorola Moto G7 Power. ...
- Google Pixel 3a.

Samsung is widely-regarded as having some of the best displays on the market. Everyone is shouting about OLED - from [Apple](#) to low-price brands who boast about having AMOLED displays.

The display on the Samsung Galaxy S10+ is fantastic. Samsung used to be known for sometimes excessive vibrancy and there's still a vivid option if that's what you want, but things look more natural than they have done in previous years, making for a first class display.

With 6.4-inches of space, Samsung pushes a 3040 x 1440 pixel resolution, 522ppi, which is incredibly sharp. But it defaults to 2280 x 1080 pixels - the same FHD+ resolution that many affordable rivals use - to save battery and, in many cases, because you probably don't need that level of detail all the time.

Ultimately, there's a lot in the Samsung Galaxy S10+ that's the same as before. If you're looking for refreshed excitement then the Galaxy S10+ doesn't really offer that. But it does offer a great experience with strengths in all areas and will certainly be one of the best phones of 2019.

[Read full verdict](#)

For

- Outstanding display
- Fun wide-angle camera
- Sound quality
- Software experience and features

Against

- Low light camera experience
- Software update track record

When the [Samsung Galaxy S8](#) launched in 2017, it established a path that [Samsung](#) is still following in 2019 with [the Galaxy S10](#). Landing in big and little sizes, we've always been drawn to the plus model because of all that luxurious screen space that you get.

In contrast to other brands, Samsung hasn't made radical changes of direction, even in this [tenth year of Galaxy S phones](#). The iPhone, in contrast, is very different moving from [iPhone 8](#) to [iPhone X](#), while Huawei has aggressively established itself with its P and Mate models.

So did Samsung get it right all those years ago, or is Samsung getting a bit ... samesung?

Verdict

In the Galaxy S10+, Samsung takes an appealing device, adds features and technologies to make sure it's ahead of the pack, and rolls on. The integration of the front cameras into the display are

Samsung's way of saying that, actually, it was right not to use a notch, while the ultrasonic fingerprint scanner is its comeback to those using inferior technology.

What's inescapable is that Samsung's flagship phone creeps up in price a little, while cheaper challengers improve their offering exponentially. Huawei has been incredibly fast to move on new developments, Xiaomi is pushing camera enhancements in a device that's nearly half the price, while mid-rangers now have to power to offer an experience that challenges top tier devices.

For those with a Galaxy S9+, we wouldn't say there's a huge rush to upgrade when it comes to performance, with the difference really in that front camera implementation and the wide-angle rear, but if you've been happily using a Galaxy S8 or Note 8 and are tempted to upgrade, you won't be disappointed.

Ultimately, there's a lot here that's the same. If you're looking for refreshed excitement, then the Galaxy S10+ doesn't really offer that. But it does offer a great experience with strengths in all areas and will certainly be one of the best phones of 2019.

Huawei Mate 20 Pro

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Huawei's Mate 20 Pro not only looks like the Samsung Galaxy S, but it offers comparable power. It's a little older, but in many ways the Huawei phone was ahead of its time. It offers a great camera, wonderful build and is only really let down by software foibles. You might forgive that, however, as it's slightly more affordable.

- [Read the full Huawei Mate 20 Pro review](#)

Apple iPhone XS Max

Apple's iPhone XS Max offers a sublime big screen iPhone experience, shaking off Apple's reluctance to rock the boat too much in previous devices and embrace the big screen experience. It offers power and performance, but it is expensive, while the software progression and app support is first class.

- [Read the full Apple iPhone XS Max review](#)

Samsung Galaxy S10+

Samsung's 2019 flagship phone comes with a big experience. There's power, performance and so much refinement in the software, it's hard not to want this phone. It has one of the best displays you'll

find on a mobile device, escaping the notch for a fantastic look. Premium design with waterproofing, a great fingerprint scanner in the display and the benefit of microSD support and 3.5mm headphone socket makes for a great all-rounder.

The addition of a wide-angle camera on the rear adds to the skill set, offering variety and shooting options, with software boosting the night camera experience. While some might not like the cut-out, it's given rise to some great wallpapers and avoids the fuss of pop-ups.

- [Read the full Samsung Galaxy S10+ review](#)

2. Apple iPhone XS Max

[Apple](#) and quality go hand-in-hand. But while the iPhone XS is a step beyond the iPhone X of 2017, it's the iPhone XS Max which shakes things up. It's expensive, yes, but this is Apple really committing to the bigger phone format. The XS Max provides a big screen experience that surpasses anything the iPhone Plus models did in the past, including great battery life.

Quality of build is apparent, but there's power and speed in abundance, along with battery life and a great camera experience. But this is really a phone about immersion: it's about full screen gaming, it's about browsing without feeling that you need to reach for your iPad. It's about putting it all in your pocket for the best iPhone experience yet - but you will have to pay for it.

- [Read the full Apple iPhone XS Max review](#)

3. OnePlus 7 Pro

OnePlus has stepped up with the 7 Pro, looking to challenge flagship phone makers on all levels. That means more cameras, a bigger build - as well as the option for 5G for those with the network to support it. The 7 Pro offers a great clean software experience, focusing on speed, and pairs that with great battery life and seriously fast Warp Charging.

The cameras don't quite match the best out there, but there's now more options for OnePlus users from the triple camera system, not to mention the pop-up front-facing camera that avoids the notches or cut-outs you'll get elsewhere. OnePlus has opted not to certify for IP protection, but does offer a 90Hz display, making it super smooth. The downside is that this is a big step-up in OnePlus pricing too.

- [Read the full OnePlus 7 Pro review](#)

4. Xiaomi Mi 9

Xiaomi is making big moves outside of China, delivering some of the latest hardware at prices that are hard to ignore. Certainly, the Xiaomi Mi 9 delivers an experience that's better than the

Mi 8, with a great combination of Snapdragon 855 power and a vibrant OLED display, although you might miss out on a waterproof rating and SD card expansion.

Xiaomi's software isn't as slick as the lights of Samsung with MIUI including a lot of duplication and fuss that's generally unnecessary, but at the same time, when you're paying around half the price of the leading phones out there, you can't go far wrong.

- [Read the full Xiaomi Mi 9 review](#)

5. Samsung Galaxy S10e

Samsung's lower-priced smartphone delivers the Samsung experience at a lower price. Importantly, the S10e gives you flagship power (unlike Samsung's A models), so they only real loss is in the camera configuration. What you do get is the impressive punch hole camera in the display, an under display fingerprint scanner and a fully-featured software experience.

If you're after a smaller handset that still packs a punch, then the Galaxy S10e is well worth considering.

- [Read the full Samsung Galaxy S10e](#)

6. Oppo Reno 10x Zoom

Oppo has made a big splash with the Reno family, topped by the 10x Zoom. It's a silly name for a phone, but it mirrors much of the OnePlus 7 Pro in terms of hardware - all the way down to a pop-up wedge selfie camera to make sure that the display remains clear of notches and clutter. The result is a phone that's pretty big and bulky, but you do get good performance and battery life with that.

The Reno runs Oppo's ColorOS based on Android and while it's not hugely intrusive, there's a lot of changes and it's not a smooth and nice to use as the software you'll find on the OnePlus 7 Pro. There's also a 5G version - called the Oppo Reno 5G - but which offers the same core functions.

- [Read the full Oppo Reno 10x Zoom review](#)

7. Motorola Moto G7 Power

The Moto G family has long impressed in affordable phones. Offering a pretty clean Android build, they have been increasing the quality in recent years while pushing the price up a little. The Moto G7 Power offers something a little different, however, and that's unbeatable battery life. With a 5000mAh battery, you'll get two days of use - even if you're a power user.

So while it doesn't have the best camera, best display, or the most power, while all the other flagship devices on this list have died, the Moto G7 Power will battle through for another day. If battery matters, then definitely consider the G7 Power.

- [Read the full Moto G7 Power review](#)

8. Google Pixel 3a

The Google Pixel 3a blasts into the mid-range, offering something special - the full potency of Google's camera. It's a single lens, but it's oh so smart, producing reliable results in all conditions with effortless ease. The 3a is our pick here thanks to the £399 price point - step over to the XL and you're approaching the price of some much more powerful devices.

The Pixel 3a runs on mid-range hardware, so it doesn't quite have the punch that flagship phones offer, but otherwise it's an easy route into Google's Android system, free from bloat, at the front of the update queue and offering a great experience.

- [Read the full Google Pixel 3a review](#)

9. Samsung Galaxy Note 9

The Galaxy Note 9 from [Samsung](#) is all about the S Pen. In some ways, that makes this phone uncomfortably close to the Galaxy S9+ that launched in the same year: it looks the same, performs very much the same and offers the same features, but costs more money. It's really the S Pen that makes a difference and it's the S Pen you've got to want - or you might as well snap up the new Galaxy S10.

What's new is that the S Pen provides control that you don't get in any other smartphone - not just in the case of stylus input, but that it can now be used as a remote control for various functions, from controlling the camera to progressing through presentations.

- [Read the Samsung Galaxy Note 9 review](#)

10. Apple iPhone XR

While the iPhone XS Max is the better phone technically, [Apple's](#) second handset, the iPhone XR is seriously worth consideration. A big part of this comes down to the price. You're still getting Apple quality, you're getting all the speed and power and a great display and about the only loss is the size and the camera on the back.

For the most part you'll get the same quality of images, but you do miss that zoom lens and there's a slight difference in the iP rating. But, the iOS experience is the same and the iPhone XR

will likely give you a phone that will be more affordable for very few losses, so is worthy of consideration.

- [Read the full Apple iPhone XR review](#)

11. Google Pixel 3

The Pixel 3 from [Google](#) can never be ignored. Despite some teething troubles, the Pixel 3 and Pixel 3 XL offer some of the best cameras on the market. If you're looking for a smaller format smartphone, then the Pixel 3 offers all that power without getting too big. It offers pure and clean Android 9 Pie with some Pixel extras and is mercifully free of bloat.

The Pixel 3 and Pixel 3 XL isn't quite stellar when it comes to battery life, but it does offer wireless charging and waterproofing for a very complete handset. But you can now get that camera experience for a lot less money in the Pixel 3a - so there's slightly less of a case to be made for the Pixel 3 models.

- [Read the full Pixel 3 review](#) or [Pixel 3 XL review](#)

12. Motorola Moto G7 Plus

The Moto G7 Plus is the most powerful of the Moto G7 models, offer a great all-round proposition in the mid-range. It's unfortunately bettered by the Honor Play in terms of what you get for your money - Honor is a lot more powerful - but there's a lot to love from Moto, not least the clean Android Pie software offering.

You get decent performance from the cameras a pretty good display, a nice design and enough power to do just about everything - just perhaps not a top settings.

- [Read the full Moto G7 Plus review](#)

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