What to Look For When Buying a Used Cell Phone

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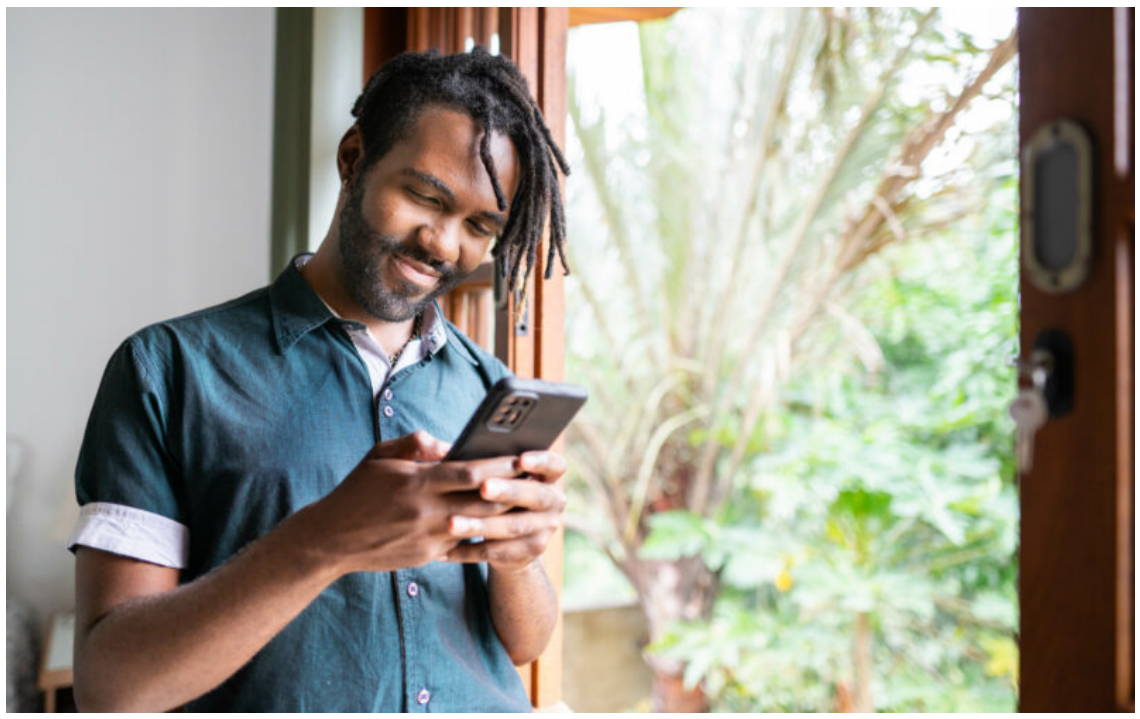

A smiling young man reading a text message on his mobile phone at a hotel on workcation.

Whether you're looking for a deal or don't feel the need to have the most current tech, buying a used cell phone is a great way to save some money while still meeting your smartphone needs. However, it's important to consider a variety of factors before you commit to purchasing a used phone. For example, you need to know what kind of condition the phone is in, its battery life, and more. Let's explore what to look for when buying a used cell phone so you can make the right purchase decision for yourself.

Condition of the Phone

This probably goes without saying, but you definitely want to make sure you're buying a used phone that's in good condition. If at all possible, make sure you can inspect the phone yourself before you commit to buying it (this is a good rule for all used electronics you might be purchasing).

When you have the old phone in hand, make sure you look at it under good light so you can look for things like scratches and dents in the casing. This may mean the phone has been dropped, which could lead to internal damage or component separation. Be especially aware of cracks in the screen—even the tiniest chip could eventually spider into a shatter sometime down the road, which may cost you money to repair. If your phone has a screen protector attached to the screen and you can remove it, do so. Screen protectors good at hiding additional damage. You'll also want to check the camera lens to see if it's scratched up.

It's also a good idea to check for indications of water damage, which isn't easily seen just by looking at the outside of the mobile phone. Depending on the make and model, there may be a moisture indicator behind the battery or in the SIM card tray. Do some research on the model you're considering before you get to the inspection so you know where to look for a moisture indicator.

Battery Life

Obviously, any phone without a solid working battery isn't worth your time and money, so you'll definitely want to make sure your used cell phone has a functional

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battery. The problem is, smartphone batteries may start losing capacity after one to two years—which means your used phone may have a battery that functions at a reduced capacity depending on how old it is. Some smartphones allow for replacable batteries, while others don't—so make sure you've done your research to determine whether or not the used cell phone you want allows for battery replacement.

Software and Firmware

While buying a used phone is a great way to save money, it can cause you headaches if you purchase a phone that's too old for software and firmware updates. These updates can be very valuable for patching bugs or security issues. If you purchase a used phone that is unable to download the latest updates, you may be leaving your phone vulnerable to hackers.

You'll also want to make sure the phone will work with your carrier. The easiest way to do this is to ensure you're buying a phone that is unlocked, and therefore can be used with any cell phone provider. At the very least, check the specs of the used phone you want and contact your carrier with the details to ensure it will work with their network. Your carrier may also have the option for you to check the phone's IMEI or ESN number on their website so you can find out if it's compatible—or even optimal—for their network. Do some online research to find out what your phone's numeric model is (for example, it may be the model of the phone plus a five-digit number).

Price and Payment

Wondering where to buy used cell phones? If you choose to go with a third-party to purchase a used cell phone, make sure you know your seller. That doesn't necessarily mean they have to be your best friend—just make sure you do your research. Especially when using auction sites or online marketplaces, check out other customer reviews to make sure you're buying from someone reputable and reliable.

Then, make sure you know what their return policy is. If they tell you the phone is in perfect working condition and it won't fire up once you get it home, you'll want to make sure you have some options available to you to make sure you get what you paid for. You should also make sure you shop around. Compare prices between sellers and see if anyone is negotiable on the price. You never know—you may get an even better deal on a used phone than you initially thought.

As with any high-price purchase, make sure you do your research on what you're buying and how much you're paying for it before you make your commitment. If at all possible, see if friends or family have recommendations on good sellers who may have the used phone you're looking for. In the end, you may wind up with exactly the phone you want for a fraction of the price of a brand new smartphone.

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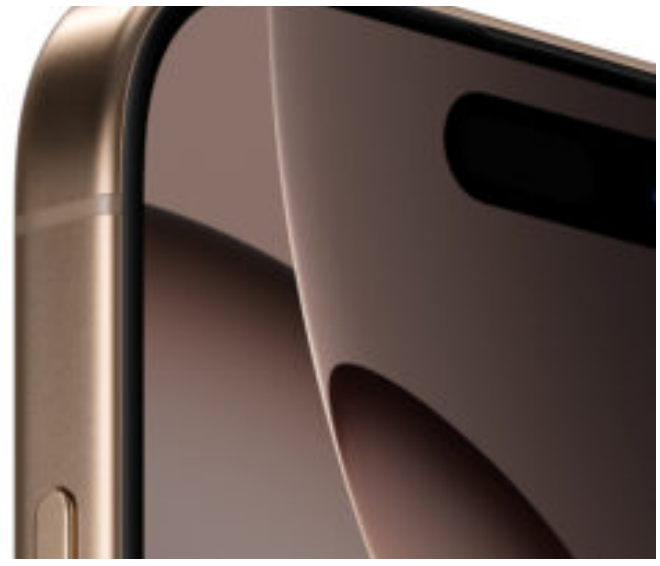

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