

Buying a Mobile Phone Online

Many of us get our phones from specialist phone stores, from the Supermarket, or Australia Post, or from our Telephone provider (eg. Telstra or Optus). Most of these phones are locked to a single phone provider.

Buying an unlocked phone outright, whether new or second-hand/reconditioned, can give you more phone for less money, with no lock-in contract. Even if you're stuck using Telstra in any case this can be an excellent proposition.

My strategy is to look for a premium last generation phones. 'Premium phones' I often think of are Google Pixels, and Samsung Galaxy models. Compared to a new \$50-100 phone from the post office, a second hand \$150-\$200 phone can, potentially, be a lot closer to the experience of owning a premium smartphone (which usually retail for \$700-\$1000).

This pays off in terms of the smoothness and speed of opening and closing apps, the brightness and clarity of the screen, speaker and microphone quality, the quality of the camera, and the speed of the device in general when on the internet or performing other tasks.

A potential unknown with second hand phones can be the battery life. It's impossible to know how much the previous owner has worn down the battery. While batteries can generally be replaced at a repair shop, with the exception of the Samsung Galaxy S5 there are no worthwhile second-hand phones available now with user changeable batteries. Some reconditioned phones may advertise that they have had battery replacements.

A bigger gotcha is buying a phone not designed for Australia. I had this hard experience recently when helping someone buy a reconditioned Samsung Galaxy S5 on ebay.

While this phone was sold as unlocked and working with all Australian networks this was not the whole truth. Here's what I discovered:

- Not all Samsung Galaxy S5 phones are alike. They have model numbers in addition to Galaxy S5, which are more like this SM900G. A Galaxy S5 SM900i and a Galaxy SM900T can be very different! This applies to all types of phones.
- The phone model number showed the phone used to be a locked phone on the USA AT&T phone network. This phone had a customised version of Android installed, so that it would run on Australian networks, and this custom Android version could

not be upgraded. This meant the phone was restricted to Android 4.4 version, when other Galaxy S5s were running Android 6.0

- While the phone had been 'hacked' to run on Australian networks, it was lacking the radio frequencies which allow 4G connectivity in rural areas. There is no way around this issue—phones in different parts of the world have different 'radio' chips which control their ability to connect to different frequencies. This meant, in Northcliffe, we had to force the phone to use only the 3G network, and the phone range was much more limited.
- The phone had problems with disconnections which might have related to the lack of 4G ability, or to the custom Android version.
- These issues are difficult to explain and resolve in a Warranty process where the vendor lives in a city, where the phone frequencies are different.
- The vendor had some 'weasel words' in his original listing 'International Version' which enabled him to claim that the buyer was informed of the phone's limitations.

Eventually the solution was to buy a second Galaxy S5, making sure this time to get the Australian model. This worked beautifully, and, despite being a 5 year old phone, was a dramatic improvement on the new \$70 phone my friend had purchased from Woolies.

Upshot: do your research and find out the true Australian model number (usually an Asia Pacific model number), and make sure this is what you're buying.

It isn't only ebay second hand and reconditioned sellers that import phones. *Kogan* and other discount retailers have been known to offer brand new discounted international phone versions rather than the Australian models. Beware!

ozmobiles.com.au is a great source of second hand Samsung and iphones which are all Australian stock. We haven't tried it yet but it came recommended by a local and I'll be giving it a try next time I help someone buy a phone.

Contact the CRC if you want phone buying advice.

Graham



Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 10am to 5pm • Thursday, Friday 10 am to 6pm