Australia's best smartphones

COMPARE MOBILE PLANS

Australian comparison website analyses the best plans for the most popular smartphones

Australias smartphone penetration rate is amongst the highest in the world, if not the highest with research from Google recently revealing that smartphones have just passed 50% of market share. The strong Australian economy, combined with a love for tech and fewer exclusive deals between manufacturers and telcos, has lead to Australians having better access than most to every type of handset on the market. But with an abundance of choice comes confusion, and the competition is so fierce that most people dont know which way to turn.To help narrow down the field and provide some clarity, comparison website Compare Mobile Plans has reviewed the top smartphones on the market to find the right phone and plan for every Australian.iPhone 4SOf the 52% of phones out there that are smartphones, about 60% of those are iPhones. So nearly 1 in 3 phones in Australia is made by a single manufacturer, using a single ecosystem. If Australia is a good indication of what people would go for, given every option, then the answer would seem to be: iPhone.The latest incarnation of Apples gamechanger sports an 8MP camera, Retina hi-def screens and up to 64GB of storage. It sports the same flatbacked, glass and aluminium design as the iPhone 4. The 4S also includes a beta version of Siri, Apples voice-activated digital assistant. Its not quite ready to go (and has some difficulty with Australian accents), but it works well for simple items like setting reminders and sending basic text messages. Outright, an iPhone 4S, 16Gb will cost between $800 and $900, with earlier models going for significantly less. For most of us however, the iPhone will be bought on a plan, and all three most providers are willing to oblige. Compare Mobile Plans spokesperson, Adam Wajnberg, said: "24 month contracts are enticing, but its important to look at how much youll be paying overall. The iPhone also makes browsing and downloading apps very easy, so dont underestimate how much data youll need. Its best to look at the mid-range plans starting from $49.Vodafone offers the iPhone 4S on a $49 Cap for only an additional $8 handset charge per month, making your overall charge $57/month for $550 included value and 1GB of data. It's one of the best plans out there for getting an iPhone for a low price.Virgin offers the iPhone 4S 16GB for as little as $48/month on the Big Plan 29, but with only 250MB included and 20.5c per excess MB, its best avoided. But the $49 Fair Go Plan, with free SMS, $400 call credit and 2GB of data, plus $8 monthly handset payments, brings it neck and neck with Vodafones deal. If you are able and willing to purchase the iPhone outright, consider Amaysims Unlimited Plan. For $39.90, you get Unlimited calls, texts and MMS (multimedia messaging), plus 4GB of data with no contract! Of similar value is Dodos Magic SIM plan, which offers the same value for the same price, but with 5GB of data and 100 free international minutes. Both plans run on the Optus network. Samsung Galaxy S2Samsung has narrowed its flagship offering to two phones The Galaxy S2, and the Galaxy Nexus. The Nexus is co-developed with Google, and runs the latest version of Android, without any Samsung input into the user interface (whats called a manufacturer skin). The Nexus, which has been produced by HTC in the past, is intended to showcase Android, the Google built operating system that powers most handsets. The Galaxy S2 on the other hand, is intended to be the premier Samsung phone, containing their best hardware and design innovations, at the best price and with the best design.The Galaxy S2 is due for replacement with the S3, which has been previewed and will likely be available well before Christmas 2012. As a result, its one of the cheapest high-end smartphones around. Dodo will sell you the S2, outright, for $499. It can be found even cheaper via eBay and similar channels. Vodafone offers the Galaxy S2 on the $29 Cap with no added handset charges meaning that you pay $29/month for the phone along with $180 included value and 200MB of data. It's a decent plan for a light user, but that 200MB data cap has to be approached with caution. Mid-range users may want to go for Optus's $50 Cap with no added handset charges overall, $50/month for $500 included value and 1GB of data.Heavier users might want to try Virgin's Topless $89 Plan, with no added handset charges. $89/month gets you unlimited calls and text messages and 4GB of data.HTC One XHTC was once in the position that Samsung is now in, as the premier maker of a massive range of non-iPhones. But Samsungs recent surge and HTCs inability to focus on one clearly defined flagship model have led to big losses. The One series is aimed at improving HTCs brand, with the One X standing out as HTCs standard bearer. The One X puts emphasis on fast loading times and a long battery life. With impressive specs under the hood and a big 4.7" screen, the One X nevertheless manages to keep itself compact and slim, easy to carry around and use. The One X customises the Android OS with a custom HTC Sense skin overlay, which has been pared back to allow Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich) to do its thing. New on the market, the One X is going to be expensive outright again, you're looking at around $700-$900. It's available on plan, and it being heavily promoted by Optus and Vodafone. Vodafone offers the One X on the $49 Cap, with an additional $5 per month for the handset. Overall, you're paying $54/month for $550 included value of texts and calls and 1GB of data.Optus offers the One X fairly inexpensively on the $60 Cap with no additional handset costs, meaning overall you pay $60/month for $650 included value and 1.5GB of data.Nokia Lumia 800Before the iPhone came along, Nokia was far and away the top manufacturer of phones, and Microsofts Windows Mobile powered most early smartphones, albeit badly. When the iPhone and later Android came along, both giants were caught flatfooted. Nokia has recently lost its top place as worlds #1 mobile manufacturer, even when accounting for cheap-as-chips handsets, still popular in the developing world. Microsoft, meanwhile, has had to completely redesign its approach to mobiles. Rather than go with Android, Nokia decided to launch their assault on the smartphone world with Microsoft and the Windows Phone operating system as partners. The first line of Windows Phone powered Nokia handsets, the Lumia, is already gaining popularity in the US for its sturdy and elegant design. The Windows Phone OS, having been developed by the same team as the XBOX, sports stunning design that equals iOS in terms of looks and

usability, and exceeds Android. However, the lack of apps is still weighing down mass uptake of the operating system. The Lumia 800 is the middle child of the range, able to do it all with flair. The 710 is cheaper and sports a less space-age design, while the 900 (coming soon) comes with a massive 4.7 screen. Nokia clearly wants to get this into as many hands as possible, with outright prices of below $600 available. For those looking to pick up the Lumia 800 on a plan:Vodafone offers the Lumia 800 on a good plan for light users: the $39 Unlimited Text cap, with an additional $5 for the handset. By paying $44/month, you get $300 included value, unlimited texts, and 500MB of data.Virgin also offers a plan with the Lumia 800 for those who like texting, with no extra handset costs. The Fair Go $49 Plan offers unlimited text messages, $400 included value for calls, and 2GB of data.Heavier users will want to look at Optus's and Virgin's unlimited plans from $80 to $100 per month.Find the best smartphone for youAccording to Mr Wajnberg, there is a good plan for every phone if you know where to look. "Most smartphones are available on great plans, and all smartphones come with a list of pros and cons. The above four are all stand-outs, but it's a good idea to go into a store and try out the smartphones available there, even if you don't intend to go on the plan they're offered on. Most stores wont have working models on display, but dont be afraid to ask to see a working model if youre particularly interested in a specific model. The exception to this is Telstra shops, which usually have working models to play around with, and Apple Stores, which will have working iPhones to play around on. If youre looking online, take into account that the iOS VS Android war (Apple Fanboys vs Fandroids) is every bit as vicious and partisan as Mac vs PC, Coke vs Pepsi and The Empire vs The Rebel Alliance. Dont get dragged in play around with different models and consider what works best for you. ---ENDS---

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