The iPhone

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Two major events last month helped drive iPhone sales to new levels. On October 4, the iPhone 4S was introduced by Apple CEO Tim Cook. The next day, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs passed away. When the new phone (and new lower pricing for older models) became available on October 14, it set new records for first day sales. There's no question that the iconic device is popular, but is it good for Christians and for ministry?

What's so special about the iPhone?

The iPhone is the most popular cell phone on the planet. The first model was introduced by Steve Jobs on January 9, 2007 and available for purchase in June of that year. Since then, over 100 million iPhones have been sold worldwide.

The iPhone falls into a category known as "smartphones." Although there's no official definition of a smartphone, the simplest way to think about it is that a smartphone is like the marriage between a cell phone and a small computer with an operating system that can run a broad array of third party applications.

Prior to the launch of the iPhone, the smartphones market was largely limited to geeks like us and was led by Nokia, RIM (Blackberry), Microsoft, and Palm. Since the launch of the iPhone, smartphones have become a mass market phenomenon. As I discussed a couple of months ago, Palm no longer exists; Nokia and Microsoft have lost unprecedented market share and have recently partnered to try to regain relevance; and RIM seems to be in freefall. Apple's iOS and Google's Android have become the two dominant smartphone operating systems.

So, what did the iPhone do differently to so dramatically change an entire industry (or actually many industries)?

For starters, Apple introduced significant technical advances. Most notably, the first iPhone included the first full web browser on a smartphone – this meant that wherever they were, people could see the web

the way it was meant to be seen. The iPhone also introduced a new user interface based on multi-touch technology. Today, we are used to pinching and swiping to navigate through applications and the web on our smartphones, but this was a revolutionary concept just four years ago. The iPhone's 8GB flash drive was also a breakthrough and enabled the iPhone to serve as a credible replacement for an iPod.

At least as significantly, the iPhone introduced a new business model when Apple introduced the App Store in June 2008. This move enabled a huge ecosystem of application and content developers to create third party products for the iPhone, bring those products to market, and make money from their sale. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of applications available for iPhone users, with the catch phrase "there's an App for that" implying that the iPhone can do anything you want it to do.

Virtually all of these advances have been replicated for Android, and to a lesser extent, the other smartphone platforms. But the iPhone was the first, and carried the additional benefits of Apple's impeccable design and marketing which fuels die-hard Apple fan-boy loyalty.

What is the Benefit of the iPhone for Christians?

The iPhone and other modern smartphones can be a very helpful tool for Christians. Consider all the things you do in your daily walk with the Lord, and there's probably an app for that. There certainly are plenty of Bible apps for reading and studying God's Word. There are also prayer list management apps, sermon preparation apps, church finder apps, and hundreds of denominations and

individual churches have created iPhone apps.

Bottom line, the iPhone (and other smartphones) can be a tool to help you stay connected to God, to your church (and vice versa), and to your brothers and sisters in Christ.
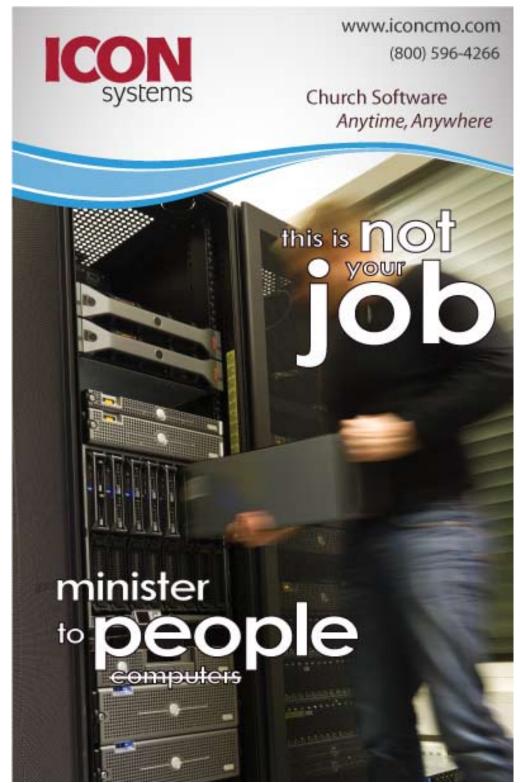
What are the Dangers of the iPhone?

So, are there dangers for Christians using the iPhone? Of course, as with any technology, there are many dangers of which we must be aware and from which we must pray for God to deliver us. I'll summarize them in terms of spiritual dangers, physical dangers, and financial dangers.

I believe the greatest danger from the iPhone is idolatry. In the first of the Ten Commandments, God commands us: "You shall have no other gods before me." When the iPhone was introduced, technology writers dubbed it the "Jesus phone" and spoke of the Cult of the Jesus phone. Pastor and evangelical blogger Tim Challies warned "This iPhone - it gives me such joy, it makes my heart long for it. But yet it can very easily take the place of God in my life." As Tim further explained "we look at idols as bad things, but generally what happen is you take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing, and that's what idolatry is." We must be careful to not put anything, including the iPhone, in the place of our love for God and our faith in His power and provision for our lives.

The iPhone also places many temptations at our fingertips, from time wasting games to gambling to pornography. Jesus taught us to pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And that prayer is certainly on my lips daily as I use technology.

As the iPhone and other smartphones have become central to our lives, there's an almost inexplicable temptation to reach for the phone every second to check for text messages, e-mails, and Facebook

updates. Unfortunately, this temptation doesn't stop when we get behind the wheel of a car. In February of this year, a church van carrying elderly parishioners was struck by a car driven by a woman talking on the phone while she was driving. Thankfully none of them was badly hurt, but there have been many well publicized stories of more tragic results of texting while driving. At least one church featured the danger on their message board, saying "Honk if you love Jesus, text while driving if you want to meet him."

Finally, we must recognize that iPhones and other smartphones carry a substantial financial burden. I can buy a simple phone for $20 from a prepaid provider and get 200 minutes of calling for $30 a month. Or, I can buy an iPhone 4S for $200 and pay Verizon $90 a month for the smallest bucket of minutes available (450) and the smallest bucket of data available (2GB). However, the beautiful web browser and plentiful apps make it hard to live within 2GB, and unless I'm on an unlimited data plan (only available in the US from Sprint for $80/month), I run the risk of paying $10 for each additional GB of data I consume. Bottom line, as good financial stewards, we must make sure we're living within the means God has provided us and appropriately prioritizing where we spend our money.

It is my hope and prayer that these articles on the power and danger of technology will encourage you in your daily walk with Christ. Whether it is the printing press, radio, television, personal computers, the Internet, mobility, Wi-Fi, social networks, or smartphones, new technologies continue to advance our ability to know God and to serve Him, wherever we go.

Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is

Hschooler.net (http://hschooler.net), a social network for Christian families (especially homeschoolers) which is being built and run by six homeschooled students under Russ' direction.