



May 14, 2007
EXECUTIVE LIFE

Souping Up Your Cell Phone

With the right software, mobile devices can perform powerful tricks.

Laptops continue to get lighter and more powerful, but would you carry one if you could get what you want from a cell phone? New applications offering everything from news to fax service to entertainment have made it possible to fit many more functions into this pocket-size package. Just be aware that if you want them, you'll probably need to purchase a wireless data plan through your cell phone carrier. Voice and data packages typically start at around \$80 a month.

VZ Navigator, included on most Verizon Wireless ([VZ](#)) phones, is one application I have been relying on. For \$9.99 a month, or \$2.99 a day, Navigator uses a Motorola ([MOT](#)) Razr, LG Chocolate, or other phone's GPS capability to pinpoint your location on easy-to-read color maps. Better yet, if you type in your destination (not while you're driving, of course) it will provide turn-by-turn directions via voice as you go. En route, the Navigator can direct you to gas stations, restaurants, and ATMs, and lets you call for reservations or hours with the click of a button.

Another of my favorites is Google SMS, which is currently in a beta version. It lets me check a flight status by simply texting my airline's name and flight number to 466453. Within seconds I receive a text message with departure and arrival times and gate number. Google SMS can also fetch driving directions and business listings and answer random questions such as "How much is \$1 in euros?" Be forewarned: You have to master special Google syntax, such as "sushi 97229," to find the nearest Japanese restaurant in a particular Zip Code. You can get guidance online.

At meetings on the run, I've found mobile-software scanR can forestall the need for a trip to FedEx Kinko's ([FDX](#)). Once I snap a photo of a business card or a document with my camera-phone, scanR lets me e-mail or fax the picture to a colleague. (Phones typically let you send photos only to another mobile phone.) The application also forwards the shot to my personal scanR Web page so I can upload the scanned business cards into my Outlook address book with just a click. No typing is involved. The service is free for up to five scans a month and costs \$3 a month for higher usage.

SPLIT THE CHECK, WIRELESSLY

To read headlines and news summaries, I use a free early version of Yahoo! ([YHOO](#)) Go for Mobile 2.0. The software, which works on more than 100 phone models, also lets me check local weather and respond to e-mail. The application's convenient menu, allowing you to scroll through pictures, feels more intuitive than the typical searching through lists.

With another service, Obopay, I can split a lunch bill without whipping out cash or my checkbook. It lets me use my cell phone to make person-to-person money transfers instantly via text messages. The service, which charges a 10 cents fee per transaction for sending funds, also comes with a prepaid cash card, which is accepted anywhere that takes MasterCard. One grudge: The person I am splitting the bill with has to register with Obopay to access the money, so cash can still come in handy.

Unwinding in between meetings, I like to listen to mobile podcasts. While nearly all wireless carriers offer a way to get them, I have recently fallen in love with the free Voicelndigo application that comes preloaded onto Samsung's UpStage music phone from Sprint Nextel ([S](#)). Besides good sound quality and stellar content, such as programs from National Public Radio and *The Onion*, the

software offers interactive features. I can send a podcast to a friend by typing in a phone number. Or I can text or call podcast creators directly, although many publishers have failed to enable the function.

Mobile music is finally taking flight. One service, Mercora, lets me listen to hundreds of radio channels with a smartphone and even access my friends' music libraries, stored on home PCs that have Mercora's free sharing software installed. Sound quality can be iffy or good, depending on connection, but the service costs only \$14.99 a quarter or \$49.99 a year. If you have an extensive music collection yourself, you can download a Mercora desktop application onto your PC for free and access your songs remotely with Windows Mobile ([MSFT](#)) 5.0 and PocketPC smartphones, such as Motorola's Q.

Similarly, I can tap into my home TV channels or shows recorded on my digital video recorder (DVR) using software called SlingPlayer Mobile from Sling Media. To make it work, I spent a few hours hooking up several hundred dollars' worth of hardware to my laptop and cable box. You also have to pay \$29.99 for the mobile application for a Pocket PC or Windows Mobile device. But all that effort let me watch my home television and direct my DVR to record shows remotely. Image quality can be fuzzy, and changing channels takes a while, but it works for watching shows on the go.

Mobile-TV service from Verizon Wireless can offer a better picture. Called V Cast Mobile TV, it lets me watch eight basic broadcast channels, including Fox Mobile, MTV, and CBS Mobile, for as little as \$15 a month via a special mobile-TV phone. (I used an LGVX9400 and loved its swivel screen, which allows you to watch video in landscape or portrait views.) A channel guide told me exactly when *Prison Break* would start. One bummer if you are an avid TV watcher: You'll be seeing most shows a day after they have been broadcast. Also, mobile coverage can be spotty. In certain areas, I couldn't see a thing. In other locations, video quality was stellar. But hey, if this service can cut down on my boredom while sitting in traffic or at the airport, it's well worth it.

READER COMMENTS