

iProduct Review

Today I'm reviewing the coolest new mobile gadget I've ever seen. This is cooler (in a wide variety of ways of being cool) than all the other new stuff I've reviewed since I was a kid. I've been bowled over by a lot of nifty items, but this takes the cake.

I know, "What is it?" you're asking. What's this super-cool ultra-nifty new piece of mobile tech that I'm so head-over-heels about? Well, I'll tell you: It's the i-pop (all lower case, can you dig it?). I know, you're wanting me to tell you all about it, so here goes.

The i-pop comes in a plain brown wrapper—so right off the bat this is not your typical new mobile gadget. Nowadays everything comes in sleek black with matte press-varnish and some clever zip-seal, all black with custom cut-outs and so on. Not the i-pop! It's just flopping around in a sort of cardboard envelope, and it's just glued shut with a big flap. It's not easy to open, either, so the thing won't fall out on the way to you, the customer. I don't mind saying it was an impressive reveal when this thing finally slid out onto the palm of my hand.

There's no instructions because hey, it's the 21st Century, dog. Sure, there's a sheet with a silhouette of the front panel, the main button, an arrow pointing at the button, and a cartoony finger to show you where to press, but it's way too cool to need a manual. The heading says "Getting Started," with "Empezando" and "Commencer" and "Iniziare" and "Einstieg" and "Beginnen" and "Komme I gang" in smaller type, so you know this is all-American tech, land of innovation—designed for the good old US of A but also compatible with all those other countries (probably others, too).

There's no connectors! No plug-holes for USB or FireWire (nobody uses *that* anymore, for god's sake) or DisplayPort, or (ha ha) RS-232 or Centronics (double ha ha), so you've got none of the usual fishing around for cables and plugs and adapters. That's definitely one of the main features that I really appreciated first starting out with the i-pop, and even now, afterwards.

I know it's ironic for a pop mobile tech gadget reviewer to hate wires, but clever gadgetry is coming in every day, and everything has a wire and some stupid wall-wart that won't fit my outlet strip unless I unplug two other things, and then I need one of the things I just unplugged, so I can write my goddam (sorry!) review for you, the consumer. It's my job, but it does get old. You understand.

Anyway, the i-pop rocks, since it doesn't use connectors. I guess it's Bluetooth, or maybe WiFi or WiFi Direct, or a Near-Field thing, or some new state-of-the-art (SOTA) wireless tech. Maybe it doesn't actually even need to talk to your other mobile devices, or listen to them. In any case, you're spared all the heartache, so the i-pop gets my vote for that. One button, no connectors! What could be cooler?

I forgot to mention it's white—a very hip shiny gleaming white plasticky material that's smooth and easy to the touch. It's about the size of a smallish bar of soap (not those useless tiny jokes in hotel rooms, but much smaller than a huge block of Ivory). Oh, and that one big button is also white, but it's frosted, with a slight curvy dent to it, so you know where to push even without the instruction sheet (not that you *did* need it, etc., etc.). So this matte button is set flush in the center—all you can see is the texture and that fine dark slit, around the edge (of the button). How cool is that? Like I told you, right?

How is it powered? Should I look for some classy push-twist or squeeze-slide thing to get into the battery compartment? I can't see any cuts or seams on the thing. This is always the sign of a really advanced, high concept gadget, like you only get from the big design houses like Frog and Turtle and Design, Inc., which make all the most desirable product designs and form-factors and such. In this category, the i-pop sure doesn't skimp. It's as sophisticated as any product I've ever seen, and I've seen quite a few, believe me.

To summarize: No seams (except the button), no hatches, doors,

slide-out trays, flip-covers, or jacks for annoying wires and cables and connectors and everything. Not even a loopy thing for a lanyard. Why would you dangle this thing from your belt, anyway? I never dangle any stuff that comes with a lanyard. I may leave the thing on for a while, or I attach it to the loopy thing so I can see how it works, but then after a while it's obviously a dumb idea and I take off the stupid lanyard (or cut it off, usually) and never look back.

Do you have an iPhone? I have to ask this before I go too far. Is it the latest, or an old one with a low number (one digit or less)? If not, obviously you'll feel out of it when people notice (which in my experience they always do, unless they're grandparents), but anyway. It's an aesthetic thing, where only people who are used to the cutting edge are likely to really get it (my review, of course). I don't mean that in a condescending way, but if you're new to this stuff you may have old-fashioned expectations, or (more likely) you may just not be sensitive to the latest values in product design and functionality.

OK, so now let's get to the rest of the salient points, especially how well it works and what the best features are. So hang onto your seat, and here's the User Experience (which should be spelled with a capital X since the abbreviation of User Experience is UX, not UE, as everybody knows). So anyway, here's the User eXperience!

Hold the i-pop in your left hand (I'm assuming you're right-handed; if you're not, OK, but for this review (and since I'm right-handed) we'll assume everybody is) with the button side up. Now, you might want to know which side should be up, as if you were holding a concert ticket (not such a good example, since they usually also print sideways on tickets), but this thing doesn't care! Any side, any one of the four, can be up, towards your fingers, so long as the button on the big side is up (showing).

Take a minute to feel the heft—not as light as you expected, is it? This thing just screams Build Quality. It's solid, solid, and more solid. I don't know what's in there exactly, since they haven't sent me all the specs and details, and I don't want to get too technical. But you can feel it, even if you're not an engineer or a developer or a reviewer. This is one serious little white box. I don't know about you, but I'm already really pretty much satisfied, as a customer, just from the cool appearance and the seriously

superb design values and quality of construction. The UX is off the charts, without even pushing the button.

Put your right index finger (or some other finger if you prefer one over another (although I don't know why people would actually like one finger best, but it's not for me to judge; like if your fingers were sort of your children, you wouldn't want to lose any of them, right?)) on the button, and you can feel that it's separate from the case, right? You know it will go down when you press, but wait a sec—*and just savor the precision feel*. I don't know about you, but this is always my favorite part of a new gadget or consumer product—the anticipation wondering how cool it's going to be. Feel how the texture on the button resembles leather? Or fine rubber? That's the N-th word in product engineering and fabrication. You know just by touch that it's best quality, top shelf, first-rate gear. OK, push.

When I pushed the button on the i-pop, I almost wasn't actually expecting anything specific. I was thinking, anything could happen, man. It's got something to do with 'pop,' sure, but what's pop, exactly? Is it going to make a popping sound? What if the thing contained 6 ounces of C-4? That would be one hell of an i-pop!

Or maybe it doesn't have anything directly to do with pop, and pop is an acronym, and the real coolness is that even though it is, it's all lower-case letters, so you don't realize it's an acronym (at first). Then the joke's on you, right?

Or maybe it doesn't have anything to do with the name of the product at all? What if the 'pop' refers to the initials of the guy who designed this ultra-cool gizmo? Or three guys? Or the company. That might be it. Wait. I'll check the packaging again (I forgot the name of the manufacturer). Nope, the i-pop, folks, if you must know, is from the very hip dudes at Stern & Buckley Associates, Brooklyn, New York. No p's or o's there, so at this point it's a mystery, but we'll know in a sec. If it's related to the features and functionality, that is. And if it isn't, who really cares? I sure don't!

The button goes down like silk sinking into room-temperature butter (I love analogies). I think I sensed the tiniest click inside, but this thing is so solidly built that I didn't hear it, as audio, with my ears, but I just sensed it with my finger tip. Wow! There are lights, LEDs I assume, under the button, and now the whole button is glowing red. Very cool.

There's a blue dot in the case itself (I had no idea it was transparent

(OK, translucent)) right at 12 o'clock. I was lucky to be holding it with the blue dot at 12, but I do a lot of these reviews, and I have a kind of sixth sense about how they work. (Your mileage may vary.)

Now there's a ring of blue dots all the way around the button, which is still red. It's very pretty, as a matter of fact, although I should edit this later and come up with a better word than just 'pretty.'

Now, one after another, the blue dots (not the red one) are going out, in the same order they came on. I didn't have time to count them, but there might be 12 of them, like a clock, or there could be a few more, or less. To recap: when you push the button, the first thing that happens is that the button itself lights up red, and then a ring of blue lights comes on in a circle surrounding the button, and then they go out one after another, and then finally the red light making the button glow also goes out. And it does all this silently, without a sound. Pure, unmitigated cool!

For more information, please contact me, the reviewer, or Stern & Buckley Associates. (Probably no spaces and dot com, right? Obviously! Just kidding.).