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Click to view As an open source lawyer and developer with a serious love/hate relationship with my iPhone, I couldn't wait to get my paws on the device running Google brand spankin' new open source mobile phone operating system, Android, and I wasn't disappointed. I've spent the last four days using the HTC G1 phone running the first Android release, and while it's not an iPhone-killer, it's a killer device for heavy Google users (like you and me). Let's see why Android does, and don't-live up to its hype. Note: Since the iPhone I use as the primary phone is my only experience with the touchscreen smartphone operating system, I'm going to base my Android observations on it, although the iPhone isn't the only touchscreen OS out there. (Sorry about that.) Also, when I mean the iPhone versus Android, I'm talking about iPhone 2.0 software, and when it comes to it compared to the G1, I'm talking about iPhone hardware. Is there any of this? Ok. Let's go. First, a quick tour around the G1 phone itself. The first thing the iPhone owner notices is that there are a hell of a lot of buttons before you even flip the keyboard: five to be exact, as well as a rubber trackball (which I came to love, more on that later). Love the thing aside, at first all those buttons are confusing and look like the kind of low rent next to the iPhone's sleek-as-done-they-do-that one button. The phone is also thicker, and unlike the iPhone, it has a slight bend at the bottom of it (pictured right). This can be a problem for iPhone users who like to slide their phone into the front pocket of their jeans. The iPhone slides there easily; The G1, on the other hand, bulk up to the hip a little more, and that rubber trackball can rub and roll on the fabric inside the pants. However, despite my tendency to catch on the inside of my jeans pocket, I absolutely love the rubber trackball for scrolling on the G1. From a clean economy traffic point of view, it's much, much faster to scroll and click using a trackball against a swipe and tap your finger on the screen. After only a few days, I love rubber trackball in a kind of scary, illegal-in-some-state way. The reason for the extra mass, of course, is the flip out of the full keyboard WERTY on the G1. Never had a Sidekick or any other phone with a full keyboard, it was a new experience for me, but one I came to enjoy pretty quickly, because with a full keyboard comes context-insensitive keys and a trigger combo. (More on that below.) I wasn't so excited about the idea of a big hinge on my phone, but in practice, the G1 screen flips over to display the keyboard in a very smooth, solid motion, and it clicks into place with power. The keyboard buttons don't really stick out as much as I expected, so pressing

them doesn't have that tactile feedback I was hoping for. Hoped. I make fewer typing errors on this keyboard than the iPhone touch keyboard. Unlike the iPhone, the G1 screen isn't a much touch. You can only use one finger to swipe screens or scroll up and down. This bumper for iPhone owners is used to double-finger pinch and expand to zoom in and out, especially while browsing the web. For a closer look at what the hardware is like, see Gizmodo's photo of your loaded hands. (These guys try phones for a living, so their evaluation equipment is much more informed than mine.) As for my size complaints, see Gizmodo's Sizemodo post, which compares the G1 to the other phones out there. In short, it's chunky, so you have to decide if the keyboard makes the volume worthwhile. But let's talk about the main thing that we care about here at Lifehacker: software. Android is a Google-user's dream (Duh)Android huge advantage is its tight integration with Google services that you use most-Gmail, GCal, Google Talk, Maps, and YouTube right now, although it's still missing Google Reader, Documents, Bookmarks, and so many other GOOG apps that can come in pretty handy on your phone. One can only assume how the software matures those will appear eventually. Assuming you've already installed a Google user, you pop into your Google account username and password (Google Apps domain accounts work too), and as Steve Jobs would say, BOOM! - You have email, contact list, calendar events, the entire shebang on your phone, by air, synchronized with the cloud, no contact with the computer is necessary. This was not even close to the experience I had with my iPhone, which required several email account settings and re-setups, and not a small amount of tinkering with my address book and syncing to my computer to get everything as it should be. For four days, I still haven't connected the G1 to my computer- all I need in the cloud is Google and on the phone, period. That's why heavy app Google users want Android. The software has a lot going on in it, but instead of working through every detail as you do things, let's look at a few Android perks on G1 offers that are worth mentioning. Android is a Gmail reading powerhouse. Never have I had a better experience reading email, particularly Gmail- on a mobile device like I do with Android. Android offers an interface very similar to the web front of Gmail, with conversations threading, labels, stars, archiving-all features that you would expect from full on, authentic Gmail. Update: Here's a quick Gmail video in action on Android. You can also based on a label that gets synchronized in real time. To go through conversations you can roll the trackball or click with your finger; Writing messages is obviously easy with the keyboard WERTY and you can customize your email signatures as well. To my horror, gmail's Gmail web keyboard Don't work for G1. Hopefully in the future iteration, you can hit J or K on the keyboard to move back and forth through Gmail talks. In addition to the Gmail client, there is a straight up email client for other POP and IMAP accounts. Android offers Google Maps' Street View- and combined with Compass mode, it will blow your mind. (When it can really find your location.) Like the iPhone, Android is a location known and puts Google Maps for good use. You'll get all the wonderful touch panning, zooming, satellite view, and the exactest of my current location of goodness in Google Maps on Android that the iPhone offers. One eye-popping feature that you don't get anywhere else is Google Maps Street View and a very cool Compass mode that uses your phone's accelerometer to customize what you see on the screen as you move. Here's a quick street view clip and compass mode enabled. (The clip automatically skips part of the Compass mode.) The bad news is that Android has not been able to pinpoint my location from several different locations in San Diego, meaning that any kind of location known the app will not work as intended. This is a problem, if you are considering the G1, make sure you try it in your area first. Android offers more features for what you can put on your home screen. My one huge gripe about the iPhone (and my Nokia before it) was the inability to put a shortcut on the home screen on a new text message with the number of my best half filled in To: box. Texting my spouse is a thing I do most often on my phone, so it should be a one-click or one-click act, and it's not in the iPhone 2.0 or Symbian. It's not quite that either in Android, but you can create a shortcut for a specific contact on your home screen that makes my lady's text messages a two-touch affair. Update: Just downloaded the free Any Cut app from Android Market, which expands home screen label settings to include a new text message with a filled To: Cheers! The app's capabilities, even at this early stage, are already making Android much better. Thank you, Jason! By default, you can also add a label on your Gmail label on your home screen, as well as Google Gadget (nasty, I know, this is what the bigass watch is), the music playlist, and any app or folder as well. Android puts the search front and center. Google phone would be nothing if not search-oriented. You can start searching in any context by clicking the search keyboard button (this is a magnifying glass, pictured right). With a home screen or inside the browser, you can just start typing to trigger the Google search box and go. Android includes Notifications you can drag down the shadow style box to see more information. When you install a new app, download a file, receive a new text message, email or voicemail, Android displays information in the notification bar at the top of the screen. Here's it. Incoming SMS looks like this: You can click and drag this bar notifications down to expand it and get more information (and clear the items). Compared to the modal pop-up iPhone notifications, the Android window hue definitely takes the cake. Android is not an iPod- and it's good and bad. The good news: Android ships with full on music player. The bad news is that no video player will save YouTube. The good news: Android comes with Amazon MP3 included in the default app menu, so you can buy DRM ringtones for free (which you can't do on the iPhone). The bad news: it's not an iPod. There's no integration with iTunes, and it may be years of iPod ownership to talk about, but the music player isn't as smooth and fun to use as an iPod. Will college students over the years I Mac advertising burned in her brain and iTunes Store purchases saved on the hard drive to choose for Android over iPod- that makes calls and sends-texts? It's been a while since I was a student, but I'm saying most likely not. Android offers customizable shortcuts. Fantastic thing you get with a full WERTY keyboard? Why, keyboard shortcuts, of course! Android lets you identify a combination of keyboards to run apps in the settings area. Sadly you can't assign a keyboard combination to anything beyond what the application is (like a Gmail contact or label). Offers of Android apps have barely begun. We didn't even get to android Market, where developers will start offering apps that run on Android. Now the offers of Android apps are quite thin, but there is an application quite familiar to iPhone users: the application for remote control iTunes. Here's a video demo of one of our favorite iPhone apps in action on Android. Android iTunes Remote Control from Jeffrey Sharkey on Vimeo. Android desperately needs a screenshot of the app, by the way, which is why all the screen grabs in this review are from the emulator. You can copy and paste into Android. Unlike Apple with the iPhone, Google has figured out how to do background tasks and clipboards in Android. See how the copy and paste works on the Gphone. The Android web browser is (almost) as good as Mobile Safari. As far as I'm concerned, the best part of iPhone software is Mobile Safari, and it's a tab of browsing and touch zoom and panning. The Android browser (officially not Chrome-yet) offers browsing tabs like Mobile Safari, and it renders pages just as good (it's based on Webkit, just like Safari). But that's where the lack of a few touch bites you in the ass: Android mechanisms to zoom in and out of the page and zoom in on the page just don't feel as good as a two-finger pinch safari and expand to do for me. However, the Android browser has in maps and phone set mechanisms that Mobile Safari does not. Here's a demonstration of a few neat android browser tricks. While Android Android I'm not going to suck you olde iPhone. Why I don't trade in my iPhone for G1 As you can see, Android on the G1 is a sweet setup, if a little unfinished, and as my love/hate iPhone relationship veers are more often in hate these days, it's tempting to make a switch, but I'm not just yet. Aside from the cumbersome issue mentioned above, T-Mobile's 3G coverage in San Diego is absolutely brutal. (I know we're the second largest city, but we're still a city!) As much as I drool over Android location awareness features (like Compass mode), no matter where I tried, in areas around San Diego, Android was unable to pinpoint my location (and yes, GPS was enabled). Also, while Android does a great job of bringing your Google account information to your phone, it doesn't handle multiple Google accounts at all. I use one for work and one for personal reasons, and there is no way to easily switch personas to Android right now. All this on top of the fee I would have to pay to get out of my iPhone contract means I won't be buying the G1 with Android anytime soon. But as the software matures, apps come out, and my contract comes to an end, a great chance I'll change my mind. Now the wait for 2.0 begins. Update: Gadgets at Gizmodo posted a crazy thorough review of the G1 and hit on tons of hardware parts we glossed over to focus on the software. Here it is: Google's T-Mobile G1 Android Phone Review. Reviews. firefox android google images problem

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