



"It's All Geek to Me" Show Notes

Episode 2: Cellphones!

Welcome to David Pogue's show notes for episode 2, all about cellphones!

In these show notes, I'll provide a little more detail on stuff you see on the show. It's kind of like the way cooking shows post the recipes online.

My surprise visit to Cingular. Here's the delicious setup: We wanted to stop into a cellphone store and film a salesperson signing me up for a new phone and service.

This salesguy, John, did not know we were coming! There were Cingular PR people on hand, but they thought that *they* would be the ones walking me through the segment. Fortunately, they were confident enough in their people that they agreed to let an actual store employee conduct the transaction.

I'm so glad they did, because this guy was great. As you'll notice, he was pretty darned clear on costs, hidden fees, and so on. The cellphone carriers have gotten a lot better about that lately.

GSM phones. There are two, incompatible cellphone network types in the U.S. First, there's **CDMA**. That's the older type, used by Verizon and Sprint. For Verizon, in particular, it means very good coverage. Unfortunately, these phones don't work overseas.

Then there's **GSM**, used by T-Mobile and AT&T (which just gobbled up Cingular). GSM is also the network used by most other countries, so if you have a T-Mobile or AT&T phone, you can make calls when you're overseas. For an extra fee, of course.

Restarting your 2-year contract. It's true that most carriers make you start your 2-year commitment over again if you make a substantial change to your plan.

There are some kindnesses, however. Cingular, in particular, was fairly forgiving on this point—there were certain changes that didn't reset the clock. (I don't know which policy it has now that it's AT&T.)

Hidden camera. Man, was this fun! The hidden camera, and the footage that you see here, is real. It was so "60 Minutes," dude.

The T-Mobile saleswoman shown here—with her eyes blurred out, because she didn't know she was being filmed—was especially amazing. If you listen carefully, you'll actually hear her comment, something like, "You won't have a good signal where you live." Yes, she actually *looked up my address* to see if I'd have good T-Mobile coverage at my house—and was up-front about the bad news. Good for her.

Cellphone challenge on the streets of New York. My dream here was to have a "number of steps" counter displayed on the screen during these challenges, which would tally how many steps and button presses were required to do each task. It was astounding how many steps were required! These are *not* efficient cellphones. (The guy who ultimately won was using a BlackBerry cellphone, so of course two of the tests, involving typing, were much faster for him. That's because the BlackBerry has a full alphabet keyboard.)

You'll also note that in the challenge to use Google to find out the name of the 17th President, Cory, the guy on the left, had to use Yahoo to *search* for Google, because it was too hard for him to put in a Web address directly!

Bluetooth. LOL!! The graphic of King Bluetooth, carved into a stone bearing the modern-day Bluetooth model, is hilarious. Sometimes, you don't see what the editors have done until you finally see the show on TV.

Secret "get to the beep" keystrokes. As noted in the show, you don't have to listen to the endless outgoing greeting when you just want to leave someone a voicemail message. You can cut directly to the beep by pressing a certain key:

Verizon: press *

Sprint: press 1

T-Mobile or Cingular/AT&T: press #

At the end, I noted sadly that: "Of course, you have to know which carrier the person you're calling uses, so you know which keystroke to use!"

This remains the fatal flaw of my genius idea (publicizing the "cut to the beep" keystrokes).

But here's the genius solution: publicize it yourself! When you record your voicemail greeting, say, "Push star at any time to skip Verizon's gibberish," or whatever. That way, your callers hear your voice but not the recorded lady's, and they don't have to remember what the keystroke is.

I hereby charge the Pogue Army with the task of changing their outgoing cellphone messages, this very day. Let's teach those cell carriers that they're not going to run up our bill so easily!

How many minutes you've used up. Press these secret keystrokes on your phone:

Verizon/T-Mobile: #646# (that's *MIN*, if you think about it)

Cingular/AT&T: *646#

Sprint: #4

Free directory assistance. Call 800-FREE-411. You have to listen to a 20-second ad, but it's better than paying \$2 to your carrier for directory assistance!

Or send a text message to GOOGL (46645) that says "Robert Gonzales 10024" (or whatever person or business you're looking for). Google will send back the full name, address, and phone number, within just a few seconds.

BONUS TIP: After the show aired, a reader wrote to inform me that you can now have the best of both worlds. You can get FREE directory assistance, WITHOUT having to send a text message! Unfortunately, it's only a Yellow Pages at the moment (business numbers only—not residential).

The hero again is Google. Just call 800-GOOG-411.

Popularity Dialer. You can program <http://www.popularitydialer.com> to call your cellphone at a specified time, to get you out of a boring meeting or a bad date. It's free—and it's awesome!

Questions? Feedback on the show? Email me! I'm pogue@nytimes.com.

And don't forget—you can watch the show in glorious, widescreen HIGH DEFINITION, starting June 7 on the Discovery HD Theater channel!