

Apple iPhone X review: This is as good as it gets



By [Jason Cipriani](#) | November 13, 2017 -- 12:22 GMT (04:22 PST)
ZDNet



Ten years ago, the best smartphone one could buy either ran a mobile version of Windows, came with a stylus, lacked any sort of app ecosystem, or had a physical keyboard that allowed you to hammer out emails for hours on end.

Then, Apple revealed the first iPhone. With a 3.5-inch display, an interface designed for multi-touch, and features once believed too far-fetched, the device changed an entire industry. It changed Apple, too.

Since then, the design has slowly changed and evolved. Screens have gotten bigger, different materials have been used, and features have expanded to include mobile payments and biometric authentication. But, the iPhone as a whole, remained familiar.

Users keep going back because they are comfortable and know what to expect from Apple's mobile device.

Now, with mounting competition from Google and Samsung, Apple announced the iPhone X. Pronounced iPhone "Ten," it's a nod to the past 10 years, but also a sneak peek into to the next decade.

For the past week, I've used a silver iPhone X provided by Apple. There's a lot to like, and some not to like about the iPhone X.

But one thing is clear: The iPhone X changes everything.

GLASS, STEEL, AND A NOTCH



(Image: Jason Cipriani/ZDNet)

Every conversation I've had regarding the iPhone X has revolved around: "Is it really worth \$1,000?"

Understandably, potential customers are fixated on a four-figure price tag for "just a phone."

I can't answer their question; it's not my place to dictate what is or isn't in a family budget. What I can say, however, is that the iPhone X feels like a \$1,000 device.

A stainless steel band surrounds a nearly edge-to-edge Super Retina (marketing speak for OLED) display. The back is also covered in glass.

The combination of steel and glass gives the iPhone X some weight, adding to the premium feel. It's not heavy, by any means, but the slight weight increase gives the perception that the phone is sturdier.

For reference, the iPhone 8 is 5.22oz (148g), iPhone 8 Plus is 7.13 ounces (202g), and the iPhone X is 6.14oz (174g). Keep in mind the iPhone X is smaller than the iPhone 8 Plus and only slightly bigger than the iPhone 8.



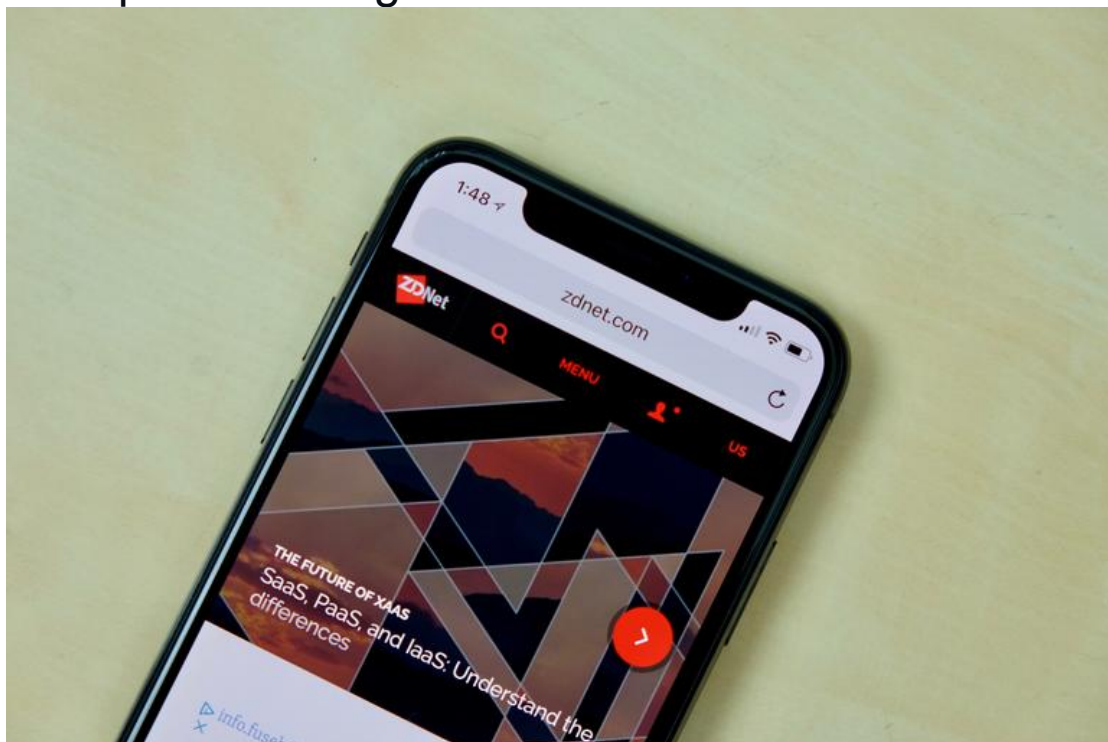
Apple iPhone 8, iPhone X, iPhone 8 Plus.
(Image: Jason Cipriani/ZDNet)

The steel band is reminiscent of the same steel band Apple has long used on higher-end Apple Watch models. The band on the space gray model is a polished black,

while the silver iPhone X has a silver steel band wrapping around it.

In all, the iPhone X measures 5.65 x 2.79 x 0.30-inches (143.6 x 70.9 x 7.7mm). With a 5.8-inch display, the iPhone X beats out the 5.5-inch display of the iPhone 8 Plus.

By eliminating bezels above and below the screen, as has been found on all every iPhone prior to the iPhone X. Without any space above the display to put the speaker camera and sensors the new TrueDepth system, Apple cut into the display ever so slightly along the top. What's commonly being referred to as the "notch" is a black bar along at the top of the screen, with actual pixels and screen space flanking both sides of it.



(Image: Jason Cipriani/ZDNet)

Unsure of just how obtrusive the notch would be before actually using the iPhone X, I've found it to more or less disappear when using the phone. Actually, I've grown to appreciate the subtle ways Apple has handled interface interactions due to the notch.

For example, when using iOS 11's new screen recording video on an iPhone 8, the entire status bar along the top of the screen would turn red. With the iPhone X, a small red oval is present behind the clock.

Third-party developers will need to update their respective apps to accommodate the taller display and the notch. Apps that aren't updated quite yet display black bar along the top and bottom. It's not the most elegant solution, but the onus is on developers.

DISPLAY

For the first time, Apple has ditched its LCD display technology on an iPhone in favor of an OLED display. The Super Retina HD display has a resolution of 2438 x 1125, with 458ppi.

DisplayMate recently [crowned the iPhone X display](#) the best it has ever tested on a smartphone, and I'm not one to argue with them. It is a gorgeous display, with Dolby Vision and HDR10 support adding to its already impressive performance.

Apple included six channel True Tone on the iPhone X, up from four channels on the iPhone 8 and iPad Pro lineup. True Tone analyzes and adjusts the white balance of the display to match your surroundings.

For users who've only ever owned an iPhone, the iPhone X is a giant leap forward in display quality and technology.

NICE KNOWING YOU, HOME BUTTON

The iPhone's home button is an icon. A key part of the iPhone's design. It's been there, tucked just below the display for the past 10 years. It's changed a bit over the years and even housed a finger reader beneath it. But it's been there, dutifully doing its job.

Using it is something most of us no longer have to think about. It's a natural extension of the phone. Press it once to go home. Double-press to multitask, hold it in to talk with Siri.

With the iPhone X, the core of the iOS interaction model is gone. There's undoubtedly a learning curve with the iPhone X. In the first few days, tapping on the non-existent home button is frequent.

Along the bottom of the screen a "hint bar" is always present. This bar is a reminder of where navigation gestures should start from.

The basic gestures include: Swipe up and lift your finger to go home; swipe up and pause midway for multitasking; swipe to the right across the hint bar to quickly switch between recent apps; swipe down from the top-left corner to the end of the notch to view notifications; and swipe down from the top-right corner to open Control Center. With the exception of accessing Control Center, a week into using the iPhone X, I've fully adjusted to the lack of a home button. In fact, the new interaction model makes the iPhone X feel like it's running a familiar, but entirely different version of iOS.

As for accessing features like Siri, powering off the phone, and taking screenshots -- that's all done with the side button and volume controls. The side button is located on the right side of the frame, and, in essence, replaces the home button for a handful of tasks. Hold it in to talk with Siri, or double-press it to launch Apple Pay. Screenshots are now taken by pressing the volume up and side button at the same time. Powering off the phone is done by holding in either volume button and the side button at the same time.

FACE ID



(Image: Jason Cipriani/ZDNet)

Face ID has replaced Touch ID as a means of securing your iPhone, and for making purchases. Instead of scanning your fingerprint, the iPhone X scans over 30,000 data points on your face to recognize you. Apple claims there's a 1 in 1,000,000 chance of Face ID being fooled, whereas that number was 1 in 50,000 for Touch ID.

In moving on from Touch ID in favor of a different biometric tool, Apple had to deliver an experience that did more than match Touch ID. It had to improve upon the experience of

placing a finger on the home button and waiting for the phone to unlock. All of it happened in a split second.

The longer I use Face ID, the more I feel like fingerprint readers are outdated. It's so quick and seamless I've started to forget its even there. I pick up the iPhone X and swipe up from the bottom of the screen, as if there was no lock screen, all the while Face ID is working in the background.

I've had it successfully identify my face when wearing glasses, not wearing glasses, with a hat on, with a hood over my head, and with sunglasses on.

The biggest hiccups I've experienced include when the phone is sitting flat on a table or desk, or in direct sunlight. The latter still identified and unlocked, but took a couple of tries before it happened. Laying flat on a desk is a problem Apple will surely solve, or at least I hope can solve.

The iPhone X has a new tap-to-wake feature, making it quick and easy to check the time or view notifications. With the phone lying flat on a desk, a quick tap is immensely useful to check on things. However, in order for Face ID to work, you have to lean over the phone so far that it's just easier to pick it up.

The technical details of Face ID include a series of sensors, which project and analyze dots placed on your

face. Each time you unlock your phone or use Face ID, it learns a little more about your face and adjusts for better accuracy in the future. So, for a man growing a beard, Face ID slowly learns that and continues to positively recognize you. In cases where a long beard is shaved, for instance, Face ID may prompt the user for a passcode as an extra verification step. The software then relearns the person's face, sans beard and continues to adjust during subsequent scans.

All of this is done in a fraction of a second, and it's incredibly impressive.

PORTRAITS FOR DAYS



iPhone X photo captured with the rear camera using Portrait Mode.
(Image: Jason Cipriani/ZDNet)

The iPhone X camera setup is largely the same as the iPhone 8 Plus. It's equipped with two 12-megapixel cameras on the back, with both the wide-angle and telephoto cameras boasting optical image stabilization (only the wide-angle lens of the iPhone 8 Plus has OIS).

My experience with the rear camera of the iPhone X also mirrors that of the iPhone 8 Plus. Pictures are clear, crisp, and sharp. The iPhone X is one of the best cameras on a smartphone I've ever used.

What sets the iPhone X apart from previous iPhones, and Android devices for that matter (save for the Pixel 2 line), is that it can now take Portrait photos with the front-facing camera.

Using the myriad of sensors in the TrueDepth camera, the iPhone X's front camera identifies a subject, its background and the selectively applies a blur -- or bokeh -- to the shot.

Using Portrait Mode on the 7-megapixel front-facing camera has either resulted in a stunning photo, or a blurry mess. It reminds me a lot of when the iPhone 7 Plus launched and Portrait Mode arrived via a software update a few weeks later.

There's some work to be done with just how aggressive the software is in applying a bokeh.

FAST, SMOOTH, LONG-LASTING

The iPhone X is powered by Apple's six-core A11 Bionic processor. Two of the cores are used solely for high-performance tasks, such as augmented reality apps or games. The four remaining cores are used for the more routine tasks, such as web browsing or checking email.

All of that to say, performance on the iPhone X thus far has been stellar. It's fast, the touch screen is responsive (I've yet to experience any freezing in the cold here in Colorado), and battery life matches that of the iPhone 8 Plus. I'm able to get through an entire day of use, starting just after 6 am until roughly 10 pm, with some power left over.

THE PHONE TO BEAT

Reviewing smartphones for a living has given me a somewhat jaded view of the mobile landscape as a whole. In an industry where yearly incremental upgrades are the norm, it's easy to appreciate the subtle changes, but hard to be downright impressed with the entirety of a device.

With the iPhone X, I'm downright impressed. This is, easily, the best smartphone I've ever used. Forget being the best iPhone... it's the best phone. Period.

Fans and pundits alike have screamed and pointed fingers at Apple, proclaiming the company, known for groundbreaking designs and high-quality products, has

somehow lost its touch under the tenure of CEO Tim Cook. But Apple has quietly and consistently been chipping away at technological breakthroughs.

Just look at the technology that's used in Face ID. It's more or less the same technology Microsoft used in its Kinect product for the Xbox platform. Only, in a much smaller form factor. Apple was able to shrink all of those components down into something that's comparatively miniature.

Samsung is the manufacturer of the OLED panels Apple uses in the iPhone X. Samsung has long been praised for the display quality of its Galaxy smartphone line, and up until the latest DisplayMate report, it had achieved the "best display ever" title for many years running.

Apple didn't just use Samsung's panels and call it good enough. Instead, Apple innovated and developed its own tuning method, added True Tone, and beat Samsung at its own game.

Admittedly, I've often wondered if Apple had indeed lost its way. After using the same core iPhone design for the past three years, how could I not? The elongated footprint and mechanical home button felt old and tired.

After using the iPhone X for the past week, it's clear Apple hasn't lost a thing. In an industry where new smartphones

are released on what feels like a weekly basis, it's hard to remember that Apple does things on its own schedule.

With the iPhone X as starting point of that schedule, perhaps for the next 10 years in the same way the original iPhone had been for the previous 10 years, it's hard not to get excited. Not just for Apple and the evolution of the iPhone, but for the entire smartphone industry. There are many times when Apple is late with a product or a feature, but, again, it's because the company follows its own schedule.

However, those times often lead to the rest of the industry trying to mimic and recreate what Apple has.

As I said earlier, it's not my place to tell you whether or not the iPhone X is worth \$1,000. For me, it surely is. I couldn't see myself using the iPhone 8 or iPhone 8 Plus for the next year, especially with the iPhone X available.

I'm far more comfortable being asked if someone should get the iPhone X over an iPhone 8, to which my reply is: Without a doubt, yes.

original article:

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