

# Sights & Sounds of Multimedia

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## Blackberry Curve Smartphone

I finally decided to give up my old cell phone which I had used successfully for some 5 years! After considering various possibilities and trying out a couple of new phones, I decided on a Blackberry. It seemed like one of the most popular instruments being used, particularly by businesses.

I got the Blackberry Curve, the most advanced at the time, and because Costco had a "real deal" on them. What with rebates and being a new customer for AT&T, the phone cost nothing. The monthly charge is more than I had been paying, as you might guess, almost three times as much! But I get a lot more, too.

The features include not only the typical cell phone service, but also email, access to the Internet, access to various ring tones, a camera and the ability to use the device as an MP3 player. I have a full QWERTY keyboard, as well. One of the great things about the Blackberry is the many additional features you can install on it.



For example, I have an applet by ESPN that gives me up-to-the-minute sports news. While I'm not an avid sports fan, it's nice to see what U of A did tonight or who is in the NFL playoffs.

I also have two GPS mapping applets which work quite well. I've used them on several trips. They provide directions, or a turn-by-turn map, but no voice. There is also a "where am I?" feature, which may be quite handy if you are lost or disoriented.

Another applet that is handy is Yellow Pages. Here, you can look up the location and phone number of any business. The app presumes you want to look in your locality, but you can enter a specified location that's different. I found it to be a bit confusing to use.

I have another app that is sometimes useful: TV Guide Mobile. This is sort of like the print version with listings by time and channel. The setup includes a question about your cable provider, so you get listings that include all the cable channels, as well as the local stations. There is a search feature by title, keyword or time and channel. There are also other tools to find or remind you of what you want to watch.

Yet another app is the ABC News which gives you the up-to-date headlines and associated articles. They include thumbnail pictures as well.

There are so many applications I couldn't begin to list them all. The Blackberry Owner's Lounge has a section of downloads of various types. To give you an idea of the variety, I catalogued the following: 182 games; 57 productivity, 36 entertainment, 38 travel and more.

This is a wonderful and very popular device. I highly recommend it.

**About:** Blackberry Curve Smartphone

**Vendor:** Research In Motion  
[www.blackberry.com](http://www.blackberry.com)

**Price:** normally \$50-\$200 purchase;  
monthly charges vary with services provided

## Vista Ultimate

Last spring I bought a new notebook computer, the Toshiba Satellite. I got that particular one because it was very light and had a smaller screen. For traveling, the HP notebook I have is too bulky and heavy.

This Toshiba has 2 GB memory, which I hoped would make the operating system faster than is the HP (528 MB). However, the Toshiba came with Vista Home Premium installed, which slows things down somewhat, compared with XP.

Those of us who attended the Southwest Computer Conference in San Diego last May each received a copy of Vista Ultimate from Microsoft. This was a generous gift for the folks from Mindshare!

I debated whether to upgrade my Home Premium or to give away Ultimate in the User Group raffle. Finally, I decided to do the upgrade. The hardware

passed the test of adequacy, though there's no indication of whether one is well over the minimum or just over. It's a pass/fail sort of test.

I started the upgrade and was advised that it could not be completed unless the power cord was attached. This prevents the upgrade from failing in midstream should battery power be exhausted. Attach the cord! The upgrade proceeds.

I had no idea that the upgrade would take such a long time. In my case, with a pretty fast machine, a large hard drive and lots of memory, it took over 2 hours! I've done many installs/upgrades of Microsoft operating systems over the years, but this one was longer than any other, by a wide margin.

Several restarts were required during the upgrade process. The process did not require user intervention which was a nice feature. The information that would have been user-provided in a clean install would have already been available.

Well, after all that time, what's different? Not much. The interface looks much the same. There are a few minor differences that aren't that noticeable. For running applications that are minimized, hovering over the task bar icon for the application shows a thumbnail of the window; not of a great deal of use. The screen savers are enhanced; you have the Bubbles screen saver,

which has various sized bubbles floating around the screen, the Aurora screen saver, the Ribbons screen saver and more.

The most hyped feature is being able to show all the open windows in a paged view, sort of like a book with its pages leafed out. This, again, is neat, but not that useful in practice.

Media Center is another feature of Ultimate. While this is a nice feature, and quite fully-functioning, it isn't something that I would normally use.

There are some free downloads that are only available for Ultimate: *Hold 'Em Poker* (you against the computer); *Tinker* (a puzzle game); *DreamScene* (a desktop background using video instead of still images), and *Sound Schemes*.

All in all, there wasn't much value in the upgrade, at least to me. Microsoft thinks the difference between Premium and Ultimate is worth about \$60. Perhaps so. It certainly is pretty!

**About:** *Vista Ultimate*

**Vendor:** Microsoft  
[www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista](http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista)

**Price:** \$320 MSRP; Upgrade over Premium \$60

