

What is Android?

 [Print this guide](#)

Android is an operating system (OS) for smartphones developed by Google, similar to the way in which Windows is an OS for PCs. It's the software that constantly runs on the phone, managing its more basic functions and supporting any apps (applications) that are run on top of it.

Some 32.9 million phones running Android were sold in the last quarter of 2010, making it the most popular smartphone platform in the world. Android has a worldwide market share of 75%. Android phones are the biggest competitors for Apple's iPhone (which uses its own operating system: iOS).

Android's key benefits and features

- Android runs on many different smartphones. Some of the more popular recent models are the HTC One, the HTC Evo 3D, the Motorola Photon 4G, the LG Optimus, the Samsung Galaxy S 4, Nexus 4 from Google itself.
- Android is capable of most of the innovations brought in by the iPhone, such as easy web and email browsing and a touchscreen menu. However, Android also has its own innovations that have now been adopted by the iPhone, such as multitasking.
- The availability of more advanced features depends on the exact model of phone being used. However, almost all models will have a camera for taking pictures and videos and GPS for satellite navigation.
- Like iPhones, Android phones have their own 'app store' in the form of [Google Play](#) (formerly the Android Market). As of July 2013 over one million apps were available – everything from word processing, games, price comparisons, photography and video to travel, news and painting – the list is huge.
- Android is an 'open source' system and, as such, is far more easily modified and personalised than the iPhone's iOS. Its app store is also less restrictive. However, this more free-form approach means that using an Android phone is a slightly less slick and user-friendly experience than using an iPhone, although this is improving.

Alex Duin is a freelance writer specialising in technology.

Next steps

- ▶ [What is a smartphone?](#)
- ▶ [Types of computer devices](#)
- ▶ [The best video calling apps for Android phones](#)
- ▶ [How to download and use Skype for Android phones](#)

How do digital skills change lives?

Find out about Digital Inclusion

