

THE TechZone

Are Phone Upgrades Worthwhile?

As Apple and Samsung unveil new flagships, consumers are questioning whether yearly upgrades still deliver enough to justify the price

Place two smartphones side by side — one from 2022, one from 2026, both priced above \$1,000. Ask anyone in the room to identify the newer model. Most cannot. That quiet, uncomfortable experiment captures one of the most significant shifts in modern consumer technology: the era of the transformative smartphone upgrade is over, and what has replaced it is something far more calculated.

From Apple's iPhone to Samsung's Galaxy series, the world's two dominant smartphone brands have presided over a period critics are increasingly calling 'incremental theatre' — marginal improvements dressed in premium pricing

and billion-dollar keynote events. Tech reviewers assessing the Galaxy S25 series this year reached for a word once unthinkable for a flagship device: safe. The tactics sustaining this cycle are well documented. In 2016, Apple deployed a software update that secretly reduced the performance of older iPhones, prompting millions to replace devices that were functioning without fault. The company settled with attorneys general from more than 30 US states for \$113 million. Camera megapixel counts have climbed from 12 to 200, despite

optical engineers confirming that the human eye cannot distinguish the difference on a phone screen. Annual launch events are engineered as psychological resets — research found that nearly half of iPhone users planned to upgrade a working handset after watching Apple's September keynote. Even the trade-in programme, marketed as consumer benefit, is structured so that manufacturers profit on both the new sale and the refurbished resale of the surrendered device. Consumers are quietly recalibrating. The global average smartphone replacement cycle has extended from 2.4 years in 2014 to 3.5 years in 2025 — a shift that manufacturers are acutely aware of and commercially dependent on reversing. Mid-range handsets priced between \$300 and \$500 now deliver performance within ten percent of flagship models costing three times as much, a gap that the majority of everyday users cannot perceive in daily use.

The next genuine shift may lie in foldable devices and on-device artificial intelligence — both of which are attracting serious investment from both Apple and Samsung. Whether either will restore the sense of transformation that defined the smartphone's first decade remains to be seen.

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RØDE Introduces the DS3, a New Professional Desktop Studio Arm



RØDE has today introduced the new DS3, the next generation of its professional desktop studio arm, building on the popular DS2 with greater load capacity, improved adjustability and enhanced stability for today's creator setups.

With a 1.5kg payload capacity, DS3 supports heavier equipment for the modern-day creator, from broadcast-grade XLR microphones like RØDE's Pod-Mic to other large-diaphragm microphones, cameras, lights and accessories. An integrated, precision-engineered ball head delivers smooth, controlled and virtually silent positioning, allowing on-the-fly adjustments without disrupting a recording or broadcast in progress, while a central locking mechanism secures equipment at the desired angle in a single motion.

Like DS2, DS3 uses a weighted base instead of a traditional desk clamp, allowing it to be positioned anywhere on a flat

surface, independent of a desk edge, with no wobble or risk of tipping. The redesigned base delivers greater stability for heavier setups while keeping a compact footprint, leaving more desktop space free for other equipment.

Each finish features its own acoustic isolation pad, designed to dampen vibration as much as elevate the DS3's aesthetic. The Classic Black variant is finished with a soft-touch silicone pad inlaid on and beneath the base, while the Crisp White variant features natural cork on both sides. Cable clips keep XLR and USB cables neatly routed and out of sight, reducing desk clutter for a cleaner workspace.

Included 3/8", 1/4" and 5/8" thread adaptors ensure broad compatibility across microphones, cameras, lights and accessories, providing everything needed to mount mics and creator equipment straight out of the box.

Apple Sets September 9 Launch Event

Apple has confirmed a major September 9, 2026 launch event at Apple Park in Cupertino, with the company expected to unveil its next generation of premium devices. The event, titled "Sur-

prise and Shine," is anticipated to focus on the iPhone 18 Pro and iPhone 18 Pro Max, with reports also pointing to Apple's first foldable iPhone.

Apple is also expected to introduce updates to the Ap-

ple Watch and AirPods, while new AI capabilities and camera improvements could feature prominently. The event will be particularly significant as one of the first major product launches under new CEO John Ternus.



Google Introduces WeatherNext 3

Google has unveiled WeatherNext 3, its latest AI-powered weather forecasting model, designed to deliver faster, more detailed and accurate predictions. The model uses real-time satellite data and provides forecasts that are refreshed hourly, with resolution up to five times sharper than previous versions.

WeatherNext 3 is now being integrated into Google Search, Gemini, Google Maps, Google Maps Platform and Google Cloud. It is also designed to



improve rainfall and snowfall predictions and provide more localized forecasts.

Google says the technology could support a range of applications, from daily planning and agriculture to renewable energy and extreme-weather preparedness.

Xiaomi Unveils the 'Passport' Foldable

Xiaomi is preparing to launch its new 18 Fold on September 7, introducing a wider, passport-inspired design to the foldable smartphone market.

The device features a 5.38-inch outer display and a 7.58-inch inner screen, offering a compact form factor when folded while providing a tablet-like experience when opened.

The phone is expected to



be powered by Xiaomi's XRING O3 chipset and feature next-generation LPDDR6 RAM. It is also tipped to pack a 6,000mAh battery and a Leica-developed camera system with a high-resolution main sensor and periscope telephoto lens.

The Xiaomi 18 Fold is expected to launch first in China, with a starting price of around 12,000 yuan (\$1,650). Global availability is expected to be announced later.

Adobe Announces New CEO

Adobe has named Anil Chakravarty as its next President and CEO, marking a major leadership transition for the software giant. Chakravarty will take over from Shantanu Narayen on December 1, 2026, while Narayen will become executive chair.

Chakravarty has been with Adobe since 2020 and currently leads its Customer Experience Orchestration business and worldwide field operations. He has played a key role in developing Adobe's AI-powered products and customer experience technologies.

The leadership change



comes as Adobe accelerates its focus on AI and agentic software, while facing growing competition from AI-driven creative platforms. Chakravarty said his priority will be driving Adobe's growth and leadership in the next era of AI-powered creativity, productivity and customer experiences.

AI CORNER

AI is learning to work, not just answer

Artificial intelligence is moving beyond chatbots that simply respond to questions. A new generation of AI agents is being designed to complete tasks on a user's behalf — from researching information and organising files to writing code and managing multi-step workflows.

Instead of waiting for instructions at every step, these systems can break a goal into smaller tasks, choose the right tools and adjust their approach when something goes wrong.

The shift could change how people use computers. Rather than opening several apps and completing each step manually, users could increasingly tell an AI what



they want and let it handle the process.

But greater independence also brings new challenges. AI agents need access to data, software and online services, raising important questions

about privacy, security and human oversight.

The future of AI may therefore be less about smarter answers — and more about smarter actions.

DID YOU KNOW?



The first text message was sent in 1992.

messages but were not yet able to send them.

The message was sent using a computer because mobile phones did not yet have the technology to type and send SMS messages. What began as a simple holiday greeting went on to become one of the world's most widely used forms of communication.

Today, text messaging has evolved into a much broader mobile communication ecosystem, with smartphones offering instant messaging, voice notes, video calls and file sharing alongside traditional SMS.

It simply said "Merry Christmas" and was sent by British engineer Neil Papworth to a Vodafone executive in the UK. At the time, mobile phones could receive