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## Smartphone Savvy By Mark Costlow

Smartphones as we know them have been with us for 15 years now. The industry has a cadence, driven by Apple. Like car companies pushing a new model every year, Apple steadfastly release a new version of the iPhone every September.

For a while the pace of innovation was breathtaking. Every year brought new and exciting hardware-based features. We take for granted that our phones have detailed maps of our entire world, complete with satellite imagery, real-time traffic updates, and pinpoint accuracy of our own location. But not long ago that was fresh and new.

The market and devices have matured considerably since the breakneck speed of changes in 2010. We haven't reached the late-stage "rearranging the cupholders" phase, but the days of life-changing smartphone improvements every 1-2 years are behind us, and there's an upside to that.

Phone makers have been able to spend more time refining their products. Making tweaks to enhance the usability of a feature can often be more gratifying than navigating a complex new addition.

That is our topic this month: smart phone features you might have missed. With 15 years of iteration under their belts, phone makers have packed thousands of features into these devices. It's inevitable that most of us are unaware of most of them. Some of these are iPhone specific but many work similarly on Android.

### Clear Calling

We'll start with one that uses the device's "smarts" to make the "phone" better. Smartphones have long been criticized for being bad at the one thing they should easily master: making phone calls. Sound

quality is often poor. Earbuds, especially expensive noise-canceling models, can help in noisy environments, but it turns out the iPhone itself can make it a lot better. You just have to change a setting.

It's called "Mic Mode" and you can only access by opening the Control Center (swipe down from the top right of the screen) **while you have an active call**. Tap "Mic Mode" - it defaults to "Standard". Change it to "Voice Isolation" and it will eliminate all of the background noise and the other person will only hear your voice. It works with earbuds as well. The difference is stunning in a noisy environment.

### Input Insights

Before Steve Jobs forced the keyboardless phone on us in 2007, most thought a smartphone needed a physical keyboard. The notion seems quaint now. Thankfully the software keyboards have improved and now can help more than hinder. Here are a few ways:

- **Long-press the spacebar** to move the cursor around your text for faster editing
- When typing domain names for email or web addresses, **long-press the "." button** to get quick access to common domain endings (.com, .org, etc)
- You can **long-press other keys** to get access to the diacritical marks that could apply to that letter, such as the tilde over an Ñ
- To type a full-stop without hitting the "123" key first, **double-tap the Space button**

### Your Phone Can Read

Optical Character Recognition, or OCR, has been **around for decades**, but until recently it was expensive, error-prone and time-consuming. Now thanks to the enormous computing power in our tiny phones, paired with Machine Learning algorithms and special hardware to accelerate them, **OCR is just another feature of your phone's basic system** and apps.

On your iPhone, take a picture with some text on it (a receipt, sign, brochure, even a hand-written note). When you view the picture, you can **long-press on the text portions** and slide to select what you

want to copy, like copying from a text document. There is also a "live text" button that selects all the text in the image. With a fairly recent phone, you can point the camera at something and hit the live text button, no need to save an image at all.

The striking thing about this feature, for someone who has used OCR off-and-on since the 1980s, is how fast and accurate it is. Here are some uses for this:

- Grab a part number from under a car hood or inside a computer case
- Copy a medication name from a pill bottle and tap to look it up
- Click to dial a phone number scribbled on a post-it note
- Copy a recipe from a book or magazine, to add your own edits

On Android, this feature requires the **Google Lens app**, which is pre-installed on many phones.

## In Search Of ... Settings

The settings app on an iPhone is a dumping ground of system options and app adjustments. With myriad apps to search, you may forget what you want to change before you find the place to change it.

Happily, there is Search box at the top of the settings screen. However, when you first run the Settings app, **the Search box is not visible**. You have to scroll up just a bit to see it. This is likely why most people don't know it's there! The settings search isn't perfect, but it's better than nothing, so it's good to be able to find it.

## Safari Strategies

If you do a lot of research online, you know that searching within a web page is a critical feature. However, it has never been very obvious how to do this in Safari (in fact for many years it was not a feature at all). To do it, **open a web page, click the "Action Button" at the bottom center** of the screen. It will show you several sharing options but if you scroll you will see some more options, including "Find on Page"

In Google Chrome (on iOS or Android) the option is a little less hidden. Tap the "3-dots" menu in the lower right, and "Find in Page" is there.

You likely know you can tap the "Tab Manager" icon in the lower right in Safari to

select from current tabs and open new ones. What many don't know you can **long-press the + sign** to get a list of recently closed tabs. Scroll through the list and bring the past back to life!

Reading long text on the phone can be quite a chore if the page is full of ads or animated messages. Even non-advertising sidebars can really distract from reading a good article.

While viewing a page in Safari, tap the **AA** button next to the location bar and **select Show Reader**. In this mode the extraneous decoration falls away and you're left with a clean expanse of text to read.

To do the same in Google Chrome, you just have to **install a Reader extension**.

## Signal Improvement Trick

If you move around town a lot your phone can get "stuck" trying to talk to far-away cell towers. If your device suddenly seems slow, try this: **Enable Airplane Mode for a few seconds, then turn it back off**. This forces your phone to search out the strongest nearby signal.

## I Could Do This All Day

That's all we have space for this month, but we have only scratched the surface. There really are thousands of features tucked away in these devices. If you want to see more of these in the future, drop us a line at [help@swcp.com](mailto:help@swcp.com) to let us know.

## Avert Your Eyes

There will be an **annular solar eclipse on Saturday October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023**. The path of the eclipse runs through New Mexico, with **Albuquerque dead center for the best viewing possible**. It is very dangerous to look directly at the sun without proper eye protection **Normal sunglasses are not enough!** SWCP has some **free** eclipse viewing glasses available. If you need some, **give us a call or drop by our office** to pick them up. First come first served until we run out!

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