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By: Cosmin Vasile, Communications News Editor



[Sony Ericsson W960i Review](#)

The best Walkman smartphone

Sony Ericsson, one of the most important handsets manufacturers, is also one of the fewest that managed to educate its fans and teach them how to choose their future mobile phones. From this point of view, things are much easier for the Japanese-Swedish company, who made it clear for its consumers that it won't mix high quality music features with top-notch camera modules and latest business applications into only one handset.

Only a smart marketing politic can sell 'incomplete' products like those branded Sony Ericsson. So, what should you expect when buying a Walkman series handset? Well, there's one thing that you can be sure of – it will blow your ears. It should be branded as "Most wanted" for music freaks, because of the multimedia features that it offers. On the under hand, those that are that are looking for devices that can take high-quality snapshots will be more attached to the Cybershot series. An important segment of consumers – businessmen will also be able to choose from a wide range of smartphones, especially created to improve functionality on the go. The latter series of smartphones registered a little setback once the P1i has been launched on the market.

Even if it had all the features specific to a high-end device, the lack of speed and strange flaws in the Wi-Fi chipset made it almost a total fiasco. How did Sony Ericsson pull it out in the end? I guess the answer to this question is standing right in front of me and it's called W960i. The next Walkman series handset that has been 'stuffed' with Symbian UIQ and Wi-Fi, just to make it a (very) viable solution for businessmen.

Announced in June 2007, Sony Ericsson W960i has been made available on the market in late November 2007. The smartphone can be acquired for no less than USD 600\$, but the price may rise to almost USD 800\$, depending on the location. Both prices place it in the same range as Sony Ericsson's P1i smartphone, which made me believe that W960i could be the fortunate replacement for the less successful P1i.

Design

Usually, Walkman series handsets impress through their innovative designs and futuristic keypad layouts. The standard block design that Sony Ericsson W960i features strengthens the idea that the target of the smartphone is wider than its name (Walkman) may suggest. The standard look that doesn't impress too much may be perfect for a businessman. I'm not saying that it looks dull or ugly, on the contrary, I'm pretty sure that it will attract both sides through its appealing look and rather stylish form.

The bar handset measures 109 x 55 mm and weighs around 119 grams (battery included). These numbers are not too much for a smartphone, even if it lacks full QWERTY keyboard. Instead, Sony Ericsson W960i features a standard keypad, which might seem a little bit crowded. Keys are wide but there's no space in between them, which might cause a 'lag' when texting messages. Otherwise there's nothing bad about it, as the compound used for

manufacture has been skillfully chosen. This might be one of the few smartphones that won't be a fingerprint magnet, even if used heavily. A nice contrast between the glossy front and mat back cover adds to the glamorous look. Right above keypad layout, you will notice three touch controls that will be enabled the moment you start using the music player. The touch keys controlling the music player are pretty responsive, mostly thanks to the huge touchscreen display. Above the screen, one can see the benefits of the UMTS technology – a second camera used for videocalls. On the mat back cover of the smartphone the 3.15 Megapixel camera module is the main attraction. It features dual LED flash and autofocus.

The big external speaker placed right near the camera enables users to listen to music together with their friends. Sony Ericsson 'borrowed' the power up button from Nokia and placed it on top of the handset. Both sides of the smartphone feature few buttons such as: dual volume keys and camera button on the right side, and a jog wheel to ease the navigation through the menus. The bottom of the phone features the usual universal port specific to Sony Ericsson handsets, which can be used to charge the phone, to sync it with your PC or to attach the earphones. There's also a stylus that you can use with the touchscreen on top left of the phone, above the jog wheel. This might look (again) like a phone especially created for left-handed persons, but you'll get used to it, as it became standard for Sony Ericsson to do that to its smartphones.

Display and Camera

These days, a smartphone that lacks touchscreen is less efficient, so Sony Ericsson decided to add one of those big and marvelous displays to its latest Walkman series handset – W960i. The 2.6" TFT touchscreen supports 262k colors, 240 x 320 pixels resolution and is visible even when used outdoors in strong sunlight.

Even if it's not one of the biggest screens out there, users will still have a smooth Web experience, either you use it in portrait or landscape mode. Benchmarks scored almost identical results as its P1i predecessor, which suggests that both have the same kind of display. The screen is protected against scratches by a special cover.

Sony Ericsson W960i smartphone embeds a 3.15 Megapixels camera with two LEDs flash and autofocus. The menu of the camera is pretty much the same as the other SE's handsets, which means that it features tons of settings that might improve the quality of the snapshots.

The maximum resolution of the pictures is 2048 x 1536 pixels, while the lowest is 640 x 480 pixels (VGA). In terms of quality, you can compare it with the P1i pictures, which look much the same. There's a little bit too much contrast and sharpness, but that can easily be controlled with some of the settings that you can find in the camera menu.

Those that are looking to record clips should know that the camera doesn't score too good as a video-camera. It is only able to shoot in QCIF mode with a maximum resolution of 320 x 240 pixels at 15 fps. Lower resolutions (176 x 144 pixels) enable the possibility of capturing movies at 30 fps, but the image is low on details.

Overall, the camera module is pretty good and can satisfy any user's needs, but cannot compare with a Cybershot series handset.

Menu and Software

Sony Ericsson W960i runs on a Symbian 9.1 OS with UIQ 3.0 platform, which is similar to P1i's platform. It features the same interface, but fortunately not the same latency. What was annoying when using SE's P1i smartphone, the slow processing speed of the interface and the long responding commands, doesn't happen onto this new W960i handset. And when multi-tapping the screen gets you no results, you just have to wait, and wait, and then wait some more. Don't get me wrong, Sony Ericsson W960i smartphone is not a speedy handset, but it's nowhere near P1i.

I'm not sure if it's the interface or the low CPU that makes the phone work so slow, but the fact remains that those that will buy the W960i model will experience lags when browsing the menus. The pleasant surprise for those that weren't expecting it, is the fact that a Walkman series handset contains the whole MobileOffice package and all the features and applications that a businessman needs when he's out of the office. You can read, edit or write any document, either it's in Word, Excel, PowerPoint or .pdf file format.

Furthermore, you can use the phone to 'scan' any business card rather than stuffing your pocket with it. Just to make it complete, the WLAN connection really works, unlike the P1i smartphone's WiFi connectivity. Other productivity tools include applications such as: Calendar, Notes, Calculator, Organizer, World time and Tasks. Multimedia lovers can take advantage of the 'standard package' that all Walkman series handsets have included: MusicDJ, TrackID, Sound recorder, but also some games (QuadraPop and Vijay Singh Pro Golf 3D).

There's also a Picture editor that enables users to correct any flaws found in their pictures. Another cool option that you can use is the Standby screen which has the ability to display the music player when this is active.

You can visualize any information regarding the playlist you're listening to or you can choose to smartphone style screen which displays information about appointments, tasks and other stuff related to business (much like in P1i case). This is another proof that Sony Ericsson W960i makes it as a dual-phone, or you might consider it as 2 phones embedded into 1: business smartphone and music walkman.

For those that are using their phone to surf the Internet, Opera 8.65 for Symbian has been included and this time it is very fast. You can choose to turn the image to landscape mode, for a smoother experience. The phonebook has extensive slots for every contact and it's limited only by the internal memory. In terms of messaging the smartphone is compatible with SMS, MMS, EMS, RSS feeds, Push email, POP3, IMAP and SMTP protocols, as well as SSL and TSL encryption.

Communications

Sony Ericsson's W960i is a 3G communication device that lacks EDGE technology. I had no problems in testing the 3G data transfer speed (306 Kbit/s download and 109 Kbit/s upload) or GPRS (46 Kbit/s download and 21 Kbit/s upload) and results are within the parameters. You won't have any problems with those and it's very easy to set up such a connection.

The smartphone is also compatible with Bluetooth 2.0 with A2DP technology and features USB 2.0, all of which worked like a charm. Still, the most important thing about W960i is that it features a WiFi receiver, which fortunately works, unlike its P1i predecessor that had serious problems.

Sony Ericsson W960i offers a complete email solution and is compatible with various services such as: Push email, BlackBerry Connect, Microsoft - Exchange ActiveSync. For Internet navigation, W960i includes Opera 8.65 which is the default Web Browser. It supports HTML, XHTML, JavaScript, frames, CSS, and TSL and SSL security protocols.

The triband (GSM 900 / GSM 1800 / GSM 1900) network compatible smartphone has a good GSM signal reception, but very poor 3G signal reception. The sound is very clear and loud enough for you to be able to talk on the phone in crowded areas with absolutely no problems. Nevertheless, the vibration is somewhat mediocre in intensity and cannot be set to higher levels.

Processor and Memory

Sony Ericsson W960i features an ARM9 family processor running at speeds up to 180 Mhz. This is the same low CPU that has been embedded in P1i smartphone. This is not nearly what it should be, especially for such a rich operating system like Symbian UIQ 3.0. I believe it's time that Sony Ericsson aimed higher and implemented much better CPU's in its smartphones (see Nokia). The low CPU makes the interface of the Walkman series handset sluggish; still, it cannot be compared with P1i.

The smartphone comes with 128 MB RAM and 256 MB flash (96 reserved for Symbian and 160 user memory). The phone lacks any microSD slot card for memory expansion, but it comes with 8GB storage memory, which makes the slot card useless.

Multimedia

The Walkman series' latest addition, W960i, features one of the best and feature-rich music players that have been included into a mobile phone. Still, there are some pros and cons,

which should be emphasized. Besides the usual Equalizer that includes dozens of modes (including MegaBass), the music player features the Mood option, which can sort the music depending on your mood.

The music player sorts music by reading the ID3 tag of every song so, if the field is empty, it will be tagged as Unknown. Sound is pretty much the same as all the Walkman series phones offer in terms of quality. Even the earphones are the same and the only drawback is the fact that the vibes are not so loud. Even the external speaker is lower than on any other Walkman phone and lacks any bass capabilities. All in all, the phone features the true sound of a Walkman series handset, so any fan of the series can get the phone – it will not disappoint you. The music player can read MP3, AAC, AAC+ or e-AAC+ file formats and features DRM function.

The smartphone includes an RDS radio that can store up to 20 stations. Reception and sound are very good, and the phone can display fullscreen visualization.

Battery

Sony Ericsson W960i includes a Li-Polymer 950 mAh standard battery that has a standby time of 370 hours and up to 9 hours of talk time. In truth, the phone's battery depleted after about 5 hours of talk time and about 200 hours in standby mode. Even if the gap between the numbers is rather big, this is more than enough, not to mention that the playback time is about 18-20 hours, depending on the volume. I wouldn't expect less from a Sony Ericsson handset battery, and it's good that it has become a standard to include Li-Polymer batteries on all its handsets. This is one of the best batteries included in a smartphone, not only because of its high "endurance", but also because it's rather small compared with its capacity.

Impressions

I can definitely say that Sony Ericsson W960i is a big improvement in terms of functionality and capabilities. This is the first Sony Ericsson handset to mix Walkman series phone features with business phone features into a complete smartphone. I'd say that W960i is a much better choice for those who wanted to buy P1i smartphone and also for those that are looking to 'upgrade' their Walkman series handset.

The Good

An interesting mix of business and music features enlarges W960i's target, widening its desirability. Excellent sound, high WiFi speed and 8GB storage space, as well as very fast USB data transfers speeds also rise its functionality. I should also mention the great battery and camera, which are well above average. A true high-end smartphone, Sony Ericsson W960i should be placed at the peak of SE's range of business phones.

The Bad

Well, there is always room for better, so HSDPA and EDGE technologies should've been included. There's also the slow working interface which could have definitely been improved if a better CPU had been included.

Sales package

Sony Ericsson W960i smartphone
950 mAh Po-Lithium Battery (BST-33)
Stereo Bluetooth-headset (HBH-DS220)
Wired stereo headset (HPM-70)
USB data cable
Charger
User Guide
Carrying leather pouch

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