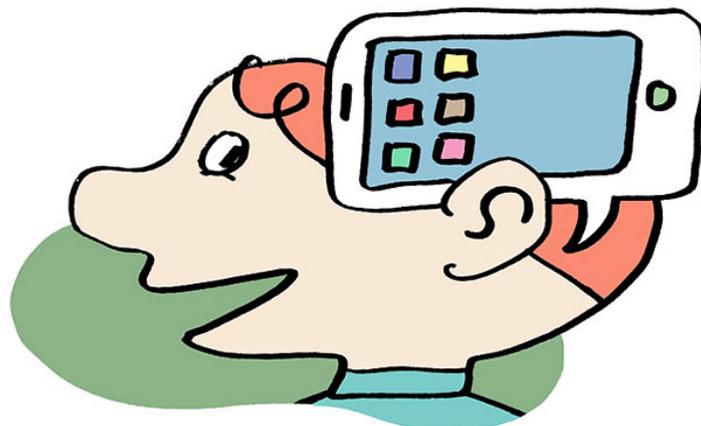


## Playing it cool with a Jawbone in your ear

David Pogue



Stuart Goldenberg

The word “apps,” of course, is short for applications, which means programs. But until 2007, nobody used the term apps except the people who wrote them — programmers. It wasn’t until the iPhone came along that apps became shorthand used by normal people.

And now they’re everywhere (apps, that is, not normal people). Apps on our phones. Apps on our TV sets. Apps on our Blu-ray players. And now, with the release of the Jawbone Icon (\$85), apps on our Bluetooth earpieces. Some kind of line has just been crossed.

Why are so many people these days clipping these wireless, cyborgish earpiece/microphone gadgets to their ears? Maybe it’s the convenience of having both hands free while they’re on the phone. Maybe they’re responding to all the state hands-free driving laws (even though study after study shows that it’s the distraction of being on the phone, and not physically holding a phone to your head, that causes accidents.)

Or maybe people think that speaking without any visible phone makes them look cool, rather than deranged.

In any case, a company called Aliph has been striving to become the Lexus of Bluetooth earpiece makers. Each new year’s model is designed to be smaller and cooler than the previous year’s. The new Icon model is the smallest and coolest yet. In a few places, in fact, the designers have stepped past cool into ridiculous. But over all, the amount of thinking that’s gone into this thing shows that their hearts are in the right place.

For example, the package — all recycled and recyclable materials (thank you, Aliph) — includes a range of black rubber rings of different sizes, to accommodate everyone from the large of ear to the cartilage-impaired. There’s also an optional over-the-ear hook to keep the thing even more solidly in place.

The pairing process is quick and simple — especially on the iPhone or BlackBerry, with no ridiculous password requirement.

(Pairing is a one-time task, in which you wirelessly mate a Bluetooth earpiece with your phone. You can pair the Jawbone Icon with as many as eight different phones; in fact, you can be on calls on two of them simultaneously, conferencing or swapping them as you see fit.)

The Jawbone’s noise-cancellation technology has improved, too. The idea here is to erase the ambient sound around you — traffic noise, washing machine, engine roar — so that you sound

clearer to your calling partners. On that score, the Icon works great. Once seated in your ear, the Icon sends and receives excellent sound.

In fact, because it's screwed right into your auditory canal — you insert it with the earpiece pointing down, then rotate it 60 degrees to point toward your mouth —it often supplies better, more consistent sound than you'd get holding the actual phone to your head.

These, of course, are all incremental improvements, and not all of them are unique to the Jawbone. There are, however, some big-ticket advances. Big-ticket changes, anyway.

First, you have a choice of six Icon designs. Not just colors — actual color/texture/design combinations. One is shiny silver; another is sculptured metallic gold; a couple are textured variations on black; and so on. Each is only 1.8 inches long.

These six models have names like the Catch, the Rogue, the Hero, the Thinker and the Bombshell. It's nice to have various choices along the ostentation spectrum.

It's easy enough to forget all about your own model's hokey name — unless, that is, you choose to replace the Icon's default female voice with one of the six available on the Jawbone Web site. (This voice reports the battery charge and incoming call number). Each has a different accent and attitude, corresponding to the six Icon models. (You can listen to them online, at [us.jawbone.com](http://us.jawbone.com).)

The Catch, for example, seems to be a perky twentysomething Valley Girl ("Hey therre! Thanks for waking me up!" she says when you turn on the earpiece). The Bombshell is all breathy female double entendre ("I'm on and ready to go"). The Rogue is some sort of French spy; The Thinker sounds like a particularly effete Kelsey Grammer: "Ta-ta!" he singsongs when you turn the earpiece off.

I can't figure out if all this hoke — the stud, the spy, the sex kitten — is meant as parody or as fantasy fulfillment. If a parody, the joke gets old awfully fast. If fantasy, well, yikes; can people really get a self-image boost from a Bluetooth earpiece?

On the same Web site, you encounter the Icon's other radical new feature: apps. Yes, actual software add-ons that you can download and install on your earpiece. (Or you will, once this feature is available; at the moment, both the apps and the voices are in a testing phase, and you have to request admission.)

Now, don't get the wrong idea; the Icon is no iPhone. For one thing, you can install only one app at a time onto your Icon. (It has, after all, only one button.) For another, at the moment, there are only five apps in the catalog. And loading them onto the earpiece is a bit of a fuss, involving downloading and installing Jawbone software on your Mac or PC, connecting the earpiece to your U.S.B. jack, and so on. (Installing the voices requires the same setup.)

Nor are these apps especially ambitious. You won't be playing any 3-D games on your earpiece any time soon.

In fact, at the moment, all the starter apps can do is connect you directly to a selection of specified services when you hold the Talk button for three seconds.

Two of them connect you to 411 information services. Two others connect you to \$40-a-year online services (Jott and Dial2Do) that transcribe your spoken utterances into written text messages, e-mail messages and reminders for yourself. (Dial2Do even lets you dictate Twitter messages by speaking them.) The fifth app sets off the dial-by-voice feature of your phone.

According to Aliph, the big news isn't the apps themselves — at the moment, they're little more than glorified speed-dial buttons — it's the operating system that makes them possible. The Icon is the first earpiece with software you can modify or add on to, which opens up certain possibilities. Someday soon, the company says, you may hold down your Talk button when you want to listen to a podcast that's on the phone in your pocket, or to listen to driving directions, or to play music.

That rich experience may take some time to evolve. For now, though, the Jawbone Icon scores happiness points for its more mundane here-and-now advances, the little things that just make it a more satisfying gadget than its less expensive rivals.

For example, it has a physical on-off slider, eliminating the usual "hold down the button for five seconds" routine. The status light is on the inside, against your cheek, instead of advertising your earpiece to the public by blinking away. The Icon, alas, has no volume control of its own; you use your phone's own controls. But thereafter, the earpiece automatically adjusts the volume of all future calls, as necessary, to match that level.

Finally, when you've paired the Icon with an iPhone, a gauge showing the earpiece's battery status appears on the iPhone menu bar. That's an astonishing development, considering Apple's traditional protectiveness of its software. Somebody must know somebody.

There are cheaper earpieces; it's conceivable that some may be more comfortable after many hours of wearing. But the Jawbone gets the right things right — size, looks, sound quality, simplicity, battery life (four hours of talk, 10 of standby) — and adds enough out-there newfangled features to keep things interesting.

**Fonte: New York Times, New York, Mar. 17<sup>th</sup> 2010, personal Tech, online.**

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para o usuário