

'Play it again Sam'

All vendors are talking about music these days, and now Samsung is joining the party with their i450.

As a company Samsung has high sales targets for mobiles this year. An extended product range and extra marketing funds are tools to help them work toward perhaps the most ambitious growth target of any vendor in the industry.

Just like most other manufacturers, imaging and music elements are hoped to help create a WOW factor, stimulating replacement sales.

Look & Feel

Back to the i450, at 17.8 mm thick it's a mid size product with a very smooth sliding mechanism. The slide feels spring-loaded, snapping open or shut with only a little assistance required from your thumb.

Sliding it down the traditional way reveals an ergonomic keypad, but also sliding up at the top provides access to a music scroll wheel.

In comparing the i450 to other music sliders, it feels more like a Sony Ericsson W850i, closer to a micro handset in size than the added bulk of a smartphone.

Overall there seems to be a bit of a novelty factor associated with this phone - a combination of the way it feels and how music is optimised.

Being part of the mobile industry, our first impression was the i450 is rather Nokia-like - not surprising as it runs on S60 software.

Consumers may not pick this up, but it's a valid sales point. Why not leverage Nokia's investment in research and development?

Samsung has changed the look of icons and graphics, but to those in the know, the i450 will seem like a cuter version of a N95.

The product's overall finish is very good, tightly moulded using high quality plastic. We tested a black version but other variants will potentially be available.

Musical Notes

As a music phone the i450 did pretty well, with dedicated direct access controls, a 3.5 mm headphone jack, stereo Bluetooth and reasonably fast USB connection.

A large ribbed touchwheel has been included as a way of scrolling through your music library more interactively. It works well after a few practice goes to adjust to the sensitivity.

Stereo speakers were developed in conjunction with Bang & Olufsen and are located either side of the music scrollwheel. These are exposed when the top part of the slide is open.

One of the greatest disappointments was no album art shown in music menus. Hopefully Samsung can remedy this in the final version of the product. Music menus should revolve around album art and leaving it out is a worry.

Apart from this, music options were easy to understand and are well laid out.

Providing free to air content, an FM radio is also included, pretty standard in most music phones these days.

Music Management

A nice touch is that the volume key works while the keypad is locked - so you don't have to go to

the trouble of unlocking things for quick adjustments.

Samsung's Audio Manager, as part of the version of their PC Studio we tested, was a bit clunky. It was basically an older version of Nokia's equivalent software.

Let's face it, most digital music-savvy consumers are going to be using either Windows Media Player or iTunes, so why even bother with proprietary software? It's better to optimise the phone to work seamlessly with standard PC music libraries.

Using playlists is the best way to manage digital music and the whole process should involve as close to zero clicks as possible.

Music did sync straight from Windows Media Player. But... Playlists had to be converted into a generic format (rather than the default Windows Media uses) - another unnecessary hassle.

A microSD slot is provided for external music storage, and the i450 seemed to work well with an optional 4 Gig card we tested.

Camera & Video

This is primarily a music phone but also includes a 2 Megapixel camera, about the minimum most phones come with these days. There's also two sizes of video that can be taken in camcorder mode, with a video editing program helping spice up the action.

Being a 3.5g product, video calling is also possible.

Screen

A nice screen helps make Samsung's i450 pleasant to use. It's bright and vibrant. Overall dimensions are pretty well balanced, including 2.4 inches of display area and a good size keypad, without making the unit too bulky.

Calls & SMS

There's no real surprises in this department as it's built on Nokia software. Inclusions include small CLI photo thumbnails when calling and in the phone book, plus relatively easy SMS entry.

Other

Even though targeted at a music crowd, productivity functions are also included such as Quickoffice (Microsoft Office) and PDF viewers can be useful in opening email attachments. A good range of game and application downloads are also available, due to the volume of S60 handsets out there.

Connections

As mentioned, there are various ways to connect, either through USB 2.0, microSD card, stereo Bluetooth or 3.5g streams/downloads over the air.

WiFi isn't an inclusion, which may have been of use with music. Most people won't mind though - as even though technically Samsung's i450 is a smartphone, this product is designed to be a groove machine rather than geek phone.

Impression

This is a novel product that might appeal to guys in their mid to late twenties. Samsung is a relatively new kid on the block with music phones and needs to focus on attention to detail.



(Above) You can see that menus resemble those in a number of Nokia products.

(Below) There's also a 2 Megapixel camera in addition to musical talent.





Music can be seen as part of an active desktop showing the active track and duration. You can play and pause from the desktop.



An integrated FM radio gives almost unlimited free content from local radio stations.



SMS is pretty easy, as an industry reader you'll probably find this menu very Nokia-esque.



Samsung's music player is clean and easy to understand. Album art would have made it look better in this view. There's two different music player views - phone or music player mode. Left: This view is how music looks in phone mode. Below: How things look when the music part of the slide is open.



Going digital means a being able to carry a lot of music with you. Playlist management then becomes important - how you decide on what to carry and play. This list was synced from a PC using Windows Media Player. ie. the list has associated songs follow it.



Here's the album view when in music mode, toggled by the top slider. You can scroll through each using the large navi wheel. Unfortunately, album art was not available on the sample tested.