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iPhone vs. BlackBerry 9000: The keyboard wars, round 2

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Do smartphones really need physical keys?

The folks who designed Apple's iPhone bet that touchscreen keys would be good enough for most users, and based on a February [survey](#) of iPhone owners that found 72% "very satisfied" (versus 55% for RIM), Apple's gamble seems to have paid off.

The complaints about the virtual keys that were so persistent when the iPhone first came out have largely gone away.

But not quite. Just as Apple ([AAPL ▼ -0.56%](#)) begins manufacturing the second coming of its famous smartphone, we have two new data points suggesting that the keyboard wars are far from over.

The first comes from an open letter to Steve Jobs posted by Dan Tynan at *PC World* in which he lists "5 Things iPhone 2.0 Must Have." No. 1 on his list: "Enlarge the Friggin' Keyboard." ([link](#))

Tynan cites an Aug. 2007 User Centric test in which 20 veteran thumb typists were confronted with the iPhone for the first time and, not surprisingly, took twice as long to enter text and made more errors. ([link](#))





What does Tynan suggest that Apple do about that? He likes the slide-out keyboard that HTC built for AT&T's (T ▲ 0.65%) Tilt, a solution he describes as “nifty.”

Given how hard Steve Jobs and his team worked to design the iPhone — stripping it down to bare essentials and selecting a form factor with as few moving parts as possible — they are unlikely to take kindly to Tynan's suggestion.





The second data point comes from *Engadget*, which has released what it says are the first leaked photographs of the new RIM (**RIMM**) BlackBerry 9000. (See their gallery of photos [here](#).) SteveJack at *MacDailyNews* was the first to point out the resemblance to — and the key difference with — the iPhone. He writes:

“RIM clearly seems to have tried to copy Apple’s iPhone’s exterior look, but beyond that derivative bit of attempted tomfoolery, the anachronistic physical buttons remain, taking up space whether or not they’re in use.

Also remaining is the small screen, mashed into the upper half of the device in order to make room for those tiny, slippery-looking plastic buttons festooned all over the bottom half of the device. The software’s UI has been prettied or messed up (depending on your taste), but it has none of the multi-touch goodness of Apple’s iPhone. It’s the same old, same old in an iPhone-inspired wrapper.

You can judge the distance behind and overall cluelessness of iPhone’s future roadkill by the amount they copy the iPhone’s exterior. See: LG, HTC, and now RIM, among many others. This ceaseless quest to dress up antiques in Apple veneer is pathetic and sad.”([link](#))

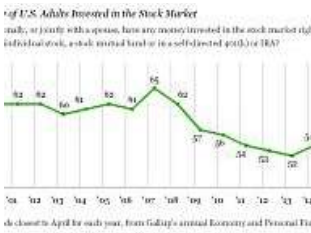
A partisan review, to be sure, and more than a bit over the top. But he may have a point.

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