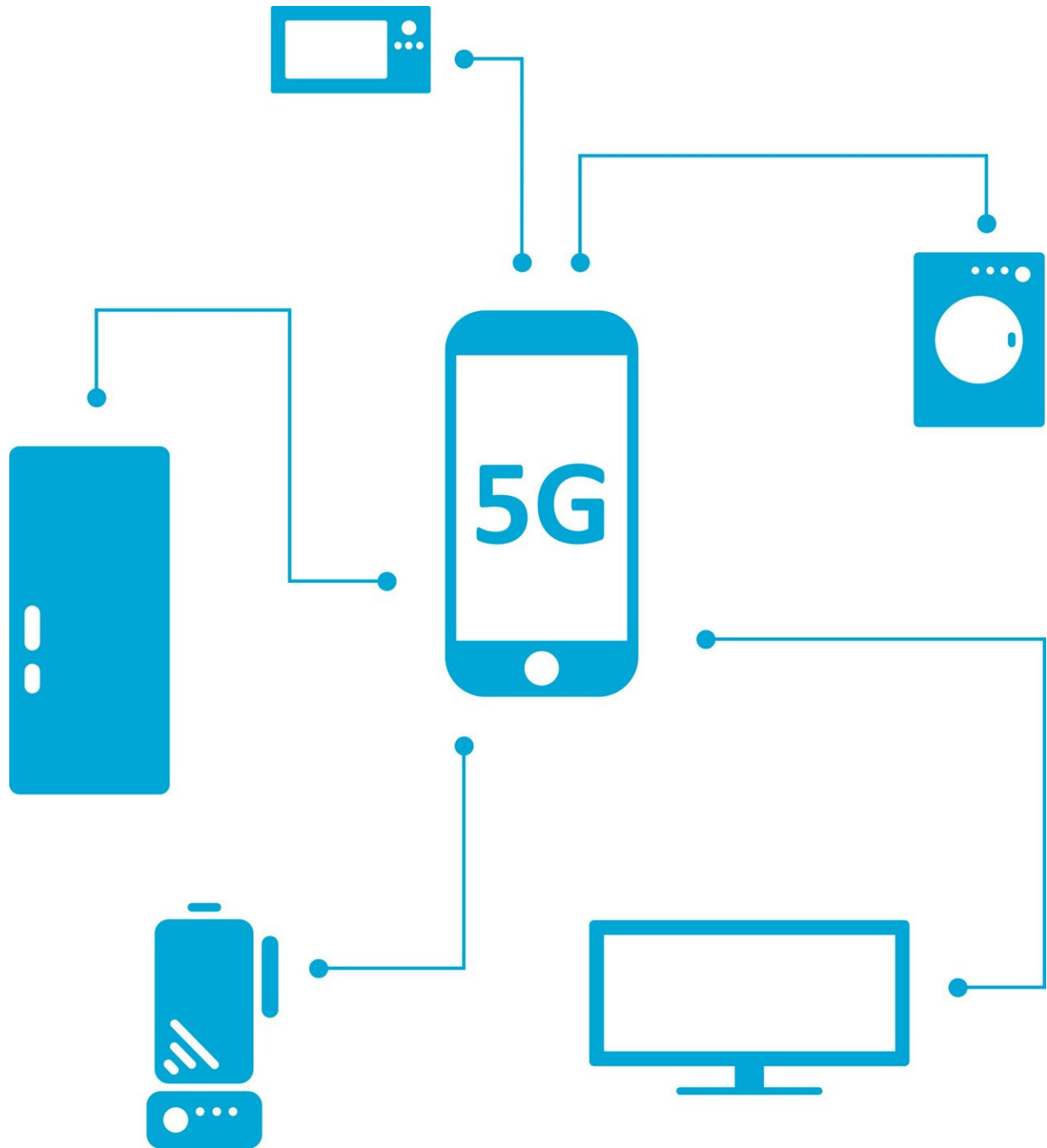


5G networks are not shining. But with new phones from Samsung and Apple, could this be 5G's year?

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Are you ready for 5G yet?

The answer is probably a firm no. Because the wireless companies aren't really ready to show you the 5G that's being hyped in stores. Yet.

But that could be changing in a few months.

The 5G networks that exist now are either not as fast as promised or spotty, and most phones, including the best-selling device in the United States, the Apple iPhone, don't work with 5G.

But Samsung's new line of Note20 phones, out Friday, all work with 5G. And in October, Apple is expected to really put 5G on the map with four editions of 5G iPhones. Daniel Ives, an analyst with Wedbush Securities, believes that will be a game changer.

He calls 5G "the most transformational technology over the last 20-30 years," not just due to [home entertainment](#) (you can download a movie in seconds, instead of minutes) but more to running the smart home, smart cities and new technologies like self-driving cars. "People will control more applications with their phones."

What about today?

Just how widespread and available in 5G right now?

Start with Verizon, the no. 1 wireless carrier. It only has 5G available in 35 markets, which will grow to 60 by the end of the year.

For now, Verizon 5G is "only in parts of select cities," according to the company. That's because Verizon primarily uses the fastest part of the 5G spectrum, called high-band millimeter wave, which is spotty and only works in certain blocks, vs. entire neighborhoods.

AT&T (in 395 markets) and T-Mobile (in 7,500) use a mix of the

slower, but more reliable low- and mid-range 5G spectrum.

All three say they are continually adding more towers from all three forms of 5G to even things out and beef up.

"The network's gonna look very different at the end of the year than it does right now," says Karri Kuoppamaki, a vice-president with T-Mobile.

Verizon, which is adding new equipment to beef up its network with low and mid-range spectrum as well, "is on track, despite COVID and storms and unrest in cities, to hit our goal this year," says Verizon vice-president Heidi Hemmer.

We tested 5G phones from T-Mobile and AT&T in Los Angeles recently and found them speedier than 4G—but just minimally. A YouTube clip, for instance, opened up instantly on 5G, vs. a 1-second lag on 4G—and didn't buffer when we advanced to the middle of the clip.

Meanwhile, for consumers, stepping up to upgrade to 5G has been costly. They have had to in the past pay a premium for getting a phone that worked with the new standard. But that's changing, too. The current Samsung Note lineup doesn't charge extra for that, and the new iPhones aren't expected to do either.

Meanwhile, while 5G phones were initially priced for premium early adopters, some new models this year offer 5G at affordable price points. The Samsung A51 (\$500) and A71 (\$599) are both way below the premium \$1,000 price point, and look to be the best buys for bargain hunters, as is LG's Velvet 5G is \$599.

The new iPhones announced next month are expected to be priced affordably on the lower end (plastic body, less fancy screen, one [camera](#)

[lens](#)) while the top of the line, according to analysts will have multiple cameras, more power and a premium price.

For wireless carriers, who has invested millions of dollars in prepping their networks for 5G, making the transition is a potential windfall for their retail stores. Just like the switch from vinyl albums to CDs, or analog to high-definition TV, if consumers want to participate in 5G, they'll need to upgrade to a new phone.

Meanwhile, what's the point to get a 5G [phone](#) now if the networks are slower than we might expect and all phones don't have 5G?

"These are early days," says Chris Sambar, AT&T's executive vice-president of network operations. "It's going to take time for the ecosystem to evolve okay, For now, the 5G will be faster than what you're currently getting, and over time," as the carriers beef up their systems, "it will get way faster."

And that's a promise.

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