

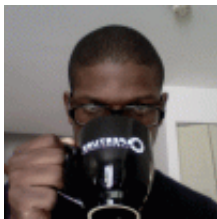
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Openmoko WikiReader Review

Posted Sep 8, 2010 03:06pm | [Ousmane Mariko](#)

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The Openmoko WikiReader. From its name, it can probably be deduced that it does one thing, and one thing only — it allows the user to read Wikipedia articles. We know what you're thinking: “who wants something that *only* does Wikipedia articles?” We felt, and still feel, that exact sentiment. But before you automatically write this thing off, we suggest taking a more in-depth look at the product. Openmoko was kind enough to send one our way and we've spent a few weeks with it trying to decipher its exact *raison d'être* and we believe that we've finally got it. Would you like to know our findings? Read on!

By now, you're probably wondering what exactly the WikiReader is. The hardware isn't anything to write home about. You've got a square-ish device clad in white with a screen taking up most of the front surface, which isn't a backlit display. It can better be described as something more like the

screen that you'd find on a Texas Instruments graphic calculator, in legibility and response time. Interestingly, that screen is not resistive, as in applying pressure will not yield any results. In fact, it sports a capacitive display, which is a very nice touch, and frankly, very much caught us off guard. Below that display are the rather mushy Search, History and Random buttons. The fourth and final button is the on / off switch and it's placed on top of the device. Up time is managed by two AAA batteries, that Openmoko claim can last a year on the WikiReader on regular use. As with anything, results may vary.

Because the device has no sort of connectivity, we knew that the WikiReader was user updatable but, for the life of us, we could not find the microSD memory card slot to do so. We'd consider ourselves seasoned gadget users, but the memory card slot eluded us to the point where we had to resort to looking in the manual (gasp!). To our surprise, nary a word was spoken about said memory card. At the end of the manual was where we were instructed to go online to find out about how updates were handled and that's when we finally figured out that the memory card was located under the batteries... it was some inconspicuous black line that, when pushed, popped out and (lo and behold) became a microSD card. Our problem with it was that it was a little difficult to reach – which can probably be blamed on our super-fat fingers – and very out of the way. That fact is a testament to the market that a device like this is marketed to – the unconnected person in all of our lives. Openmoko even go as far as providing an option for the buyer to shell out \$29 for an annual update subscription, which consists of two semi-annual updates sent on a memory card.



For something that doesn't have any kind of connectivity, it sure as heck has pretty much any Wikipedia entry we could think of. To think that pretty much any English language Wikipedia entry, with [plenty more languages added](#), is stored locally is pretty impressive. Then you take into consideration that there aren't any pictures to load and that feat doesn't seem *quite* as spectacular but still neat anyhow. It was able to find anything we looked for, even our new favorite Chiptune artist Anamanaguchi, in its database with no search lag to note. In any given article, you also get the inter-Wiki links that we're all used to seeing, further replicating a typical Wikipedia experience. Load times are minimal, which still surprises us considering that it's such a low powered device.

The WikiReader isn't going to blow you away with stunning design, innovation and crazy UI but what it does, which is allowing the user to read Wikipedia entries, it does well. Now, this device isn't for everyone. We're even going to go as far as saying that it most likely isn't for you. It's a single purpose Wikipedia device and nothing more. But is there a market, how ever small it may be, for

something like this? Especially nowadays when there's always an "app for that" and many, many people carry smartphones.



To enjoy the WikiReader, you would have to belong to one of the following groups of people: someone not connected to the internet (for any reason) who is also an information junky, someone that doesn't own a smartphone and has the space in their bag for to carry an extra device, or somewhat of a gadget collector. To get a little personal, I obviously fit in the latter. I like the WikiReader. It isn't the most cutting edge device and I've got a plethora of phones and random gizmos lying around that'll do what it does and a lot more, but this device emits some kind of simple charm which I find to be almost irresistible. It's an adorable device, and at \$99, it can almost be justified as an impulse buy, but only just so. Whether exists an actual market for such a device, we're still not sure, but Openmoko seems to think so.

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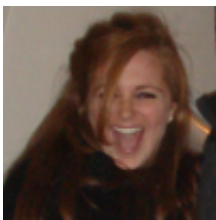
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