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Product MP 01 Mobile Phone

Punkt., £229
Review by Cate St Hill

Walk down the street and you'll see almost everyone on their smartphones: calling friends, looking down, texting, scheduling business meetings, checking (and checking-in to) Facebook, glancing at a map or taking selfies — connected, dazed and just a little bit addicted. And it's becoming increasingly difficult to disconnect from this world — we feel naked if we forget and leave our phones at home, even bring them into bed with us, and rarely switch them off.

According to Swiss technology company Punkt., we now consume more media for more hours than we sleep (since 2010 daily media consumption has risen from eight hours to more than 11 hours). We are constantly switched on, and really, it's exhausting just thinking about it.

That's part of the reason why Punkt. has launched the new back-to-basics MP 01 mobile phone, in a bid to rebalance the relationship we have with technology and provide some sort of digital detox. It's the fifth product in the brand's range since launching in 2011, all created with the mantra 'technology tamed'. Designed by Jasper Morrison, Punkt.'s art director, it performs only the core

mobile phone functions: calling and text messaging alongside the bare necessities such as an alarm clock and calendar.

Petter Neby, founder of Punkt., wants us to 'regain control' and 'disconnect and rediscover the simple things in life', he says: 'Technology is a very powerful tool but it is slowly taking over our lives. What I want to

achieve is to reclaim conversation and make us talk more. We have become slaves to technology, where everything can be told through an app.' He evangelises the MP 01 as 'a liberating device' that can be used in tandem with other technology to remove unnecessary distractions and unplug without being completely disconnected. The phone will be launched at London Design Festival and available in shops one month after.

This isn't the only product of its type and the idea of the 'anti-smartphone' isn't quite as absurd as it might sound. There's the Janus One created by Hong Kong-based designer The Peak — a similar-looking phone aimed at enabling users to have a 'simpler life,' free from 'the constant

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hassles of social networking' — and Monohm's Runcible, a strange circular gadget, part-digital pocket watch, part-wearable device. But up against smart devices such as the Apple Watch, nothing of this kind has really kicked off and become mainstream... yet.

The MP 01 itself, despite resembling a calculator, is beautifully designed, as you would expect from Morrison. A tactile, wallet-sized rectangle, it is finished with a soft-touch texture on the front and a bumpy moulded pattern on the back. The monochrome front surface features a neat Gorilla Glass anti-reflection screen and LCD screen (a specialised thin, light and damage-resistant glass), large, round buttons and a pared-back but easily

navigable interface. One button, labelled Punkt., takes you to the main menu and arrowed buttons help scroll through the options — there is little need for an instruction manual.

It's light at 88g (the iPhone 6 weighs in at 129g) but it doesn't feel flimsy. The best bit is that the MP 01 boasts 290 minutes' talk time and a whopping four weeks standby (670 hours) — a major plus for those used to iPhones dying before the day is up. It doesn't support the 3G network (why would it, when you can't go on the internet) and is SIM free, but functions on GSM, which is good, unless you live in Japan or South Korea.

With its clean lines and simple design, this is a phone for the design aesthetes out there. You can't input events into the calendar, but it is a beautiful object. The benefit would be using the MP 01 as an alternative to smart devices on just some occasions, for example if your phone runs out of battery while you're on the go, or if you want to go out for a quiet dinner and don't want to be disturbed except in an emergency.

Yet it does seem ironic that you have to invent another piece of technology to take a break from technology, are we all so completely hooked that we can't go cold turkey? Punkt. states that 'the tendency to add more and more to our tech has placed an increasing burden on us', but is the MP 01 just adding to the multi-screen environment? Maybe we've just forgotten how to use a phone as just that and not as a computer. Perhaps it's something we could all rediscover, smartphone or not.

1 - The shape of things to come, with the Punkt. mobile phone?
2 - The MP 01 only performs core functions



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