



[Return to Regular View](#)

First Look: The Beamer Video Phone

Ditch the webcam. The future is finally here, and now you can see who's on the other line with this slick device.

By [Brett Larson](#), Tech Live

In the world of science fiction, video phones were right up there with flying cars and robots with attitude that do your housework.

Until now, if you wanted to see who you were talking to on the phone, you needed pricey hardware or complicated computer programs and cameras. But not any more, says [Vialta](#), maker of the Beamer Phone Video Station (or what it likes to call PVS). The Beamer hooks up just like an answering machine and will have you looking at your callers in no time. See this slick, easy-to-use device on this week's "Fresh Gear."

Look who's talking

The Beamer has fewer buttons and plugs than most new phones. It plugs into any analog phone line and offers a plug for a phone, so you won't lose precious phone jacks. It also needs power. Once it's hooked up, you're good to go, but with one caveat: The person you're talking to needs to have a Beamer or a compatible videophone device (using the H.TK standard). When a call comes through, you'll see the caller ID information (if you have that feature from your phone carrier). Should you both decide you'd like to see each other, you both hit the start button. Within a few seconds you're on.

Don't look now

The idea of a video phone might bring up images of being caught not fully dressed, with your hair in a towel, or in some other form of disarray. That's understandable, since traditionally it never mattered how you looked when you used the phone. Worry not. The Beamer lets you send still photos instead of live video. You can also adjust the quality of your video feed, preferring either better picture quality or better movement quality. We found that the higher the quality of movement, the most lifelike the playback. When we set picture quality to high, the images were jumpy and sometimes delayed by a few seconds.

Is this the party to whom I'm speaking?

One drawback to the Beamer is that you need to provide your own phone to hear the other person. This can be a drawback, since you'll have to hold the phone to your ear or use a speakerphone. Had the Beamer included a speakerphone system, it would have been more of an all-in-one solution. Vialta has, however, done an excellent job on design. The adjustable LCD within a glass enclosure will sit unobtrusively next to picture frames and decorations on a table or desk. When not in use, the Beamer automatically shuts itself off, lighting up again the next time your phone rings. Get ready.

Summary: Desktop device quickly adds videoconferencing to any analog phone line, and it doesn't need a computer. Without having to pay fees or contracts, users can quickly communicate with friends, family, and co-workers who have the same device or a compatible device. People looking to get the picture on their phone calls will appreciate the

ease of use. It's even easier to set up.

Pros: Easy to set up; simple to use; no computer required.

Cons: Requires phone to hear caller.

Company: [Vialta](#)

Price: \$249.99 for one unit, \$499.99 for two

Available: Now

Category: Personal videoconferencing

Requirements: Analog phone line

Originally posted December 10, 2002

[Return to Regular View](#)

[Copyright](#) © 2003 TechTV Inc. All rights reserved.

Use of Techtv.com is subject to certain [terms and conditions](#). We respect your [privacy](#).