

Review: The Plantronics Voyager 5200 -- a Bluetooth headset for business class

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Plantronics' latest headset features excellent voice quality and a variety of useful controls for professionals who spend their days on the phone.

If your ear is attached to your phone during much of the workday, you are in the market for a serious headset such as Plantronics' new Voyager 5200. The latest in the Voyager series of mobile headsets, the look of the 5200 isn't subtle -- when you're wearing it, you (and everyone else) will know you're got a headset on. But that is unimportant compared to its many features, comfortable fit and excellent sound quality. It is currently selling for \$120 (vendor price).

Most consumer headsets today tend to minimize the number of hardware controls in order to keep the headset small and lightweight. The Voyager 5200 bucks that trend; it's got all the controls you'd want in a reasonably sized 0.71-oz. unit.



The controls are well designed; it didn't take me long to be able to find each while wearing the headset. The on/off switch is on the back of the main unit (the part that goes behind your ear); the micro-USB plug for powering the unit is in the bottom of that section, and two separate volume up/down buttons are on top (and easy to access).

There is a small call answer/hang-up button at the back of the boom arm (which extends approximately 3 in.), while a red button on the arm itself acts as a mute toggle and also (when you hold it down) lets you use Google Now or any other voice control.

The Voyager 5200 has its own voice control as well. For example, when somebody calls, you can say "Answer" or "Ignore." It will also handily remind you when you've got the phone on mute, either at timed intervals or if you try to speak while the mute is still activated.

The boom arm (which can be adjusted to suit either the left or right ear) contains four microphones to help handle background sounds, which it does very well. The microphones are covered by a mesh that, according to the company, is part of its WindSmart technology, which detects and adjusts to wind direction. From my two weeks' experience, it works; I was able to hold a comfortable conversation, even in noisy outdoor situations; and my callers reported that the voice quality was excellent, especially for a headset.

The Voyager 5200 also contains a feature that I've always appreciated: Smart sensors that can signal the unit if it's being worn or not. So if you're listening to music and take the headset off, it will pause the music until you replace it on your ear. If you're not wearing the headset and a call comes in, pick it up and put it on, and it will answer the call.

I found the Voyager 5200 to be quite comfortable to wear for long periods of time; it sat handily on my ear without feeling either tight or too loose. However, it was a little awkward to wear with glasses -- in fact, I had to remove my glasses each time I put the headset on, which added precious seconds when answering a call.

Plantronics has a free mobile app called the Plantronics Hub, which works with several of its devices and is available for iOS and Android devices. The app lets you know how much time is left in the battery and also allows you to tweak a wide range of settings (for example, whether the headset should auto-pause music when you take it off, and how often you should be reminded you're on mute). You can also locate a lost headset (assuming it's within hearing distance) and easily access help files.

The company claims seven hours of talk time, and if that isn't enough, for an additional \$40, you can get the charging case, which holds another 14 hours worth of charges for the phone. If you're traveling around, you can put the headset inside the case and drop it in your bag. When you're at your desk, the same case has a small indentation which lets you stand the Voyager 5200 up -- a convenient place to keep it charged and at hand.

For use with desktop voice apps, Plantronics is also selling its BT600 Bluetooth USB adapter, a small dongle adds features like visual call indicators via Windows/Mac apps; the adapter itself has a red LED that flashes to signal you're on mute. The company sells all three -- the headset, the case and the adapter -- as the Voyager 5200 UC for a vendor price of \$220.

Bottom line

The Plantronics Voyager 5200 is an excellent headset for business people who spend a great deal of time on the phone. It offers good noise cancellation, a handy mute button with an audio reminder, smart sensors for taking calls and pausing music, and a number of other useful features. Unless you're really pinching pennies, the \$40 case is a must; it not only keeps the unit charged but makes it handy to reach for when you're at your desk.

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