Advanced Customization and Troubleshooting

In this chapter, we’ll look at ways to go beyond standard Android use and customization. We’ll look at modifying the phone with themes and how to measure widgets. We’ll also look at how to troubleshoot some common problems, reboot your phone, and upgrade Android. We’ll also look at what it means to “root” your phone, including the pros and cons of doing so.

Advanced Widgets

When you add widgets to the Home screen, most widgets are already a predetermined size and shape. Either they fit in the space given or they do not. If you long-click a widget, you can move it within a screen, but you cannot make it larger or smaller. If you have a choice of widgets, you’ll find that many app developers label the widgets with things like “3×2” or “4×1.”

What does that mean? If you measure your phone’s screen not by the physical screen size, but by the number of apps you can store on it, most phones have a Home screen that measures four app icons by four app icons. The widget measurement generally goes horizontally by vertically, so a widget that measures 4×1, such as the Power Control widget (shown at the top of the screen in Figure 17–1), takes up the space of four apps across and one down. This allows you better Home screen space management.
If you want to give your phone a complete makeover, you can use one of many Home replacement themes. Most themes at this time are written for Android 1.5 and 1.6, and are designed to run using a specialized app that acts as a theme engine. They replace your standard Home screen and sometimes modify the appearance of the icons used to launch your apps. You could turn all of your icons into spaceships, sports icons, or cartoon figures with a matching background.

Popular theme engines include Freshface (shown in Figure 17–2) for G1 and MyTouch phones, aHome, Open Home, and Panda Home. The disadvantage of running a Home replacement theme is that it is essentially running an app all the time. That means it may drain your battery faster or make your phone crash more often. Be sure to check out the comments in the Android Market before downloading a new theme.