

The GPS Weblog

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Loc8tor Plus Review

Verdict: Good for Finding Your Keys or Wallet. Pets and People...Not so Much



Billed as "the ultimate tool that will help you keep tabs on your children, pets and possessions", Loc8tor Plus is a wireless handheld device that can track multiple homing tags up to 600 feet away. Slap a homing tag on anything you want to keep tabs on, and the next time it goes missing, use the Loc8tor handheld to find it.

The system relies on radio frequencies (RF) instead of GPS, making it better suited to indoor use, and retails for about \$169 (the Plus version includes the Loc8tor handheld, 3 homing tags, and 1 panic homing tag). I tested the Loc8tor Plus and found the system adequate for finding a lost set of keys at home, but not up to the task of tracking moving objects, such as children or pets.

Loc8tor relies on Radio Frequency (RF) instead of GPS. RF is a better solution for short distances and indoors use. For example, a GPS might be able to report that your child is at a shopping center, or movie theater, but it won't be able to tell you which store they're in, or which seat they are sitting in at the movie theater. For close range indoors, RF is a better solution for quickly finding kinds that have strayed outside your field of vision.

1. Features

- Up to 600 foot (183 meter) range
- Guides you to within 2.5cm / 1" of lost items
- Alert mode can warn if tagged items go outside a user set safety zone that you can set. Range can be independently set for each tag
- Miniaturized Tags can be quickly and easily attached to almost anything with the Key ring loop or adhesive strips
- Mini Homing Tags and Panic Tags can both be used in Locate and Alert mode
- Tags gives off audio beep and flashing LED to help locate
- Panic Tag enables a child or dependant to set off a distress alarm
- Up to 24 tags can be registered per Handheld
- Operating Temperature: 0C to +55C. Store between -10 and +60C
- Battery Life: 2-9 months, depending on usage
- Handheld volume at its loudest is 90dB
- Handheld size: 110cm (4.3") high x 53cm (2.1") wide x 16cm (0.6") deep, Weight: 70g (with batteries installed)
- Tag Size: 30.5mm (H) x 19.5mm (W) x 8.5mm (D) Weight: 5 grams

2. What's in the Box



Figure 1: Loc8tor Plus Retail Box, Open

The Loc8tor Plus pack includes the following items in the box:

- 1 x Loc8tor Handheld
- 3 x Mini Homing Tags
- 1 x Panic Homing Tag
- Key ring loop and adhesive strips
- User guide
- Batteries (2 x AA)



Figure 2: What's included in the Loc8tor Plus pack



Figure 3: Homing Tag

The homing tags are very small and battery life is excellent (2-9 months, depending on usage).



Figure 4: Replacing the Home Tag Battery

The homing tags weigh just 0.2 ounces (5g), and use 2 x LR54 batteries. Batteries are included for all four tags.

The small size of Loc8tor's homing tags is a definite strength of the system; small enough to add to a key chain, wallet, purse, pet collar, or child's clothing, the homing tags are considerably smaller than competing systems and have a longer battery life.

Tip: According to Loc8tor's website, the homing tags can be made waterproof by wrapping the tag in a plastic bag, or using silicon sealant for kitchen and bathrooms to plug up the seal on the tag and cover the speaker hole.

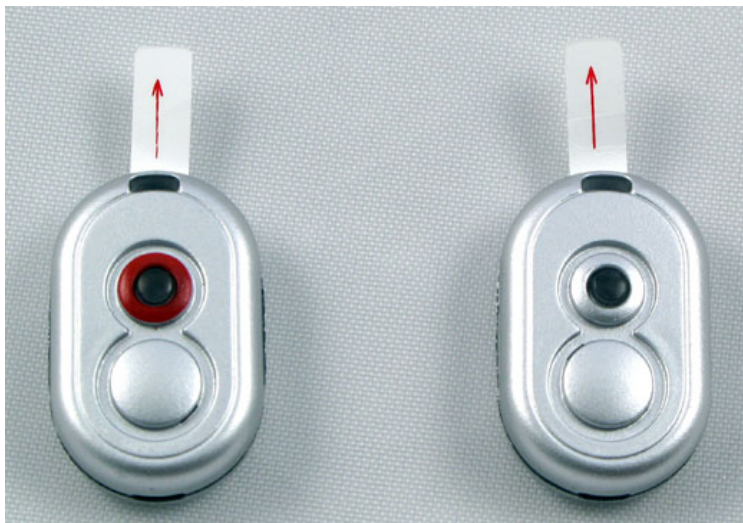


Figure 5: Panic Tag vs Homing Tag

The Loc8tor Plus pack includes three regular "Homing Tags" and one "Panic Tag", shown on the left in figure 4. A Panic Tag enables a child or dependant to set off a distress alarm. When the panic button is pressed, the Panic Tag sends an alert alarm to the handheld, causing the handheld to chirp and vibrate. Regular "Homing Tags" don't have a panic button and cannot send an alarm to the handheld.

Additional Panic Tags can be purchased separately for \$49 each from Loc8tor's website.



Figure 6: Key Ring Loops and Adhesive Strips

Four key ring loops and adhesive strips are included in the Loc8tor Plus box.



Figure 7: Loc8tor Handheld

The Loc8tor handheld is about the size of a cell phone, measuring 4.3" x 2.1" x 0.6".

The handheld is constructed of extremely lightweight plastic and feels like it could easily break. The display is protected by a sliding door, and 4 multi-colored buttons and a 4-way joystick with an enter button in the center are situated on the lower portion of the handheld.

Annoyingly, none of the controls have any labels, so you'll have to figure out what each colored button does by trail and error, or commit the manual to memory.



Figure 8: Loc8tor Handheld Battery Cover

The Loc8tor handheld device is powered by two AA batteries, included in the box. Sliding the right side panel down reveals the battery compartment, shown above. Insert the batteries and re-attach the cover.

3. Using Loc8tor



Figure 9: Opening the Loc8tor Handheld Unit

Press down slightly on the protective LCD cover and slide it upwards until it clicks into position.

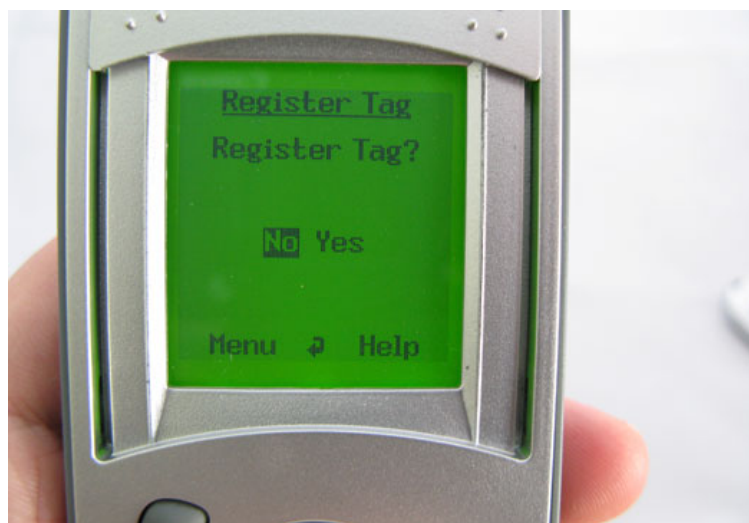
**Figure 10: Controls Layout on the Loc8tor**

For some ill-advised reason, none of Loc8tor's buttons have any labels. Pressing any of the buttons will power on the handheld, although technically the documentation states that the gray button (upper left) is the power button.

If you press one of the other buttons instead, Loc8tor will power itself on and jump straight to that menu. For example, if you press the yellow button first, Loc8tor will power itself on and go straight to the "Register a new tag" screen.

**Figure 11: Welcome Menu**

The first time Loc8tor is powered on, the Welcome menu appears, prompting you to register the first Homing Tag to the handheld (or Panic Tag).

**Figure 12: Register Tag Menu**

Pressing the yellow button brings up the Register Tag Menu, shown above.



Figure 13: Select Yes to Register A New Tag

Use the 4-way iPod-like joystick to highlight "Yes" and then press the enter button to begin the process of registering a tag with the handheld.



Figure 14: Registering Tag

The Loc8tor handheld begins searching for a Homing Tag or Panic Tag. While the handheld is in the registering mode, touch the handheld with the Homing/Panic Tag you want to pair with the handheld.

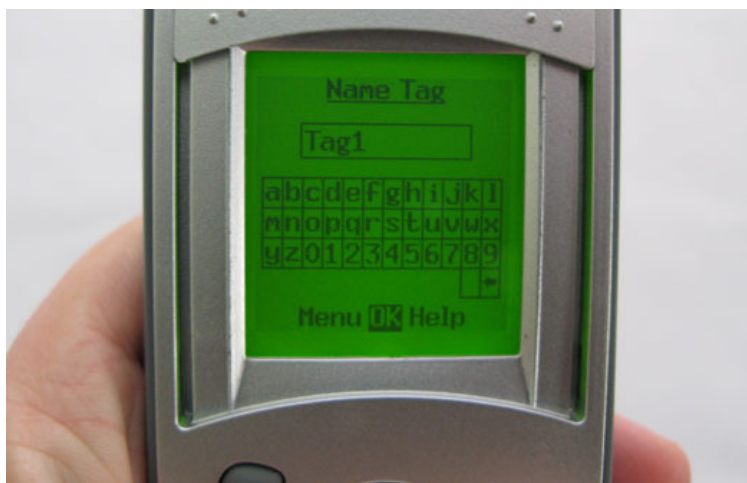


Figure 15: Naming the Tag

Each tag can be named (up to 10 characters). Using the 4-way joystick, highlight one letter at a time to spell out the tag name (e.g. "Wallet", "Cat", "Keys", etc.). Highlight and select OK when you've finished entering the name.



Figure 16: Choosing a Tag to Locate

Once the tag has been paired with the handheld and given a name, the device is ready to locate.

Press the gray button to access the Locate menu, shown above, and select the tag you want to find.

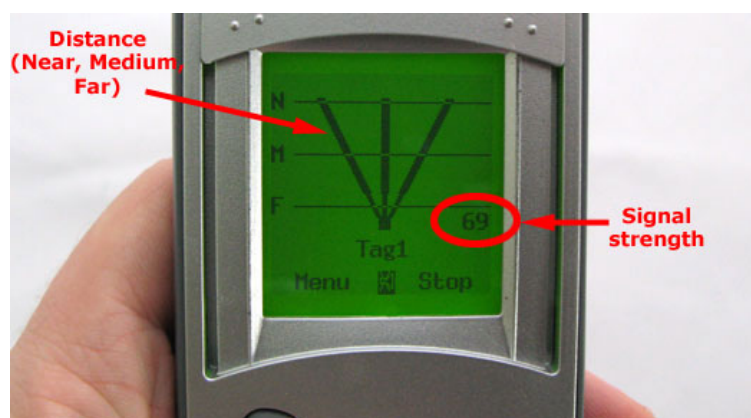


Figure 17: Locating a Tag

Locating a Homing/Panic Tag with the Loc8tor handheld is like using a 21st-century divining rod; as you get closer to the tag, the handheld beeps an audible tone faster, and the signal strength increases. As you move further away from the tag, the signal strength decreases, and the rate of beeping tones slows down.

The distance indicator is crude, but works for conveying a general sense of how far away from the tag you are: near, medium, or far.

Once you get within a few inches of the tag, a solid tone is heard from the handheld, indicating you have found the tag.

4. Pros

- Very small homing tags
- Long battery life
- Lightweight
- Menu system is easy to use
- Only have to pair tags to the handheld once (it remembers the pairing even after powering the handheld off)
- Includes a total of 4 tags, including 1 Panic Tag (a tag with an alert button)

5. Cons

- No direction indicator, only signal strength and distance
- Buttons have no labels, so it's hard to know what each button does
- Feels cheaply made
- Expensive
- Alarm not loud enough to be heard in public places

6. Conclusion

Using the Loc8tor is like playing an electronic game of Marco Polo. Audible beeping sounds let you know whether you're getting hotter or colder, as you move about trying to zero in on the missing Tag. There's no direction indicator on the handheld, so you'll have to go through a process of elimination, turning in circles and moving in various directions until the signal strength increases and the beeping noise speeds up.

The Loc8tor handheld unit feels cheaply made -- one good drop and the lightweight plastic will almost certainly shatter. Worse, there's no labels on any of the buttons to let you know what function each button performs. I did appreciate the ultra-small size of Loc8tor's homing tags, as well as the longer-than-average battery life (2-9 months, depending on usage).

It can be somewhat frustrating (and time consuming) hunting down a tag, but it does work eventually for stationary objects such as keys, wallets, etc. However, the Loc8tor Plus system isn't accurate enough for use on people or pets, as it takes too much time to hone in on a missing tag while

you search room to room and listen for the faster/slower beeping tone.

Tracking down a stationary object is difficult, but possible with Loc8tor. Tracking down a moving target is mission impossible -- especially without the benefit of an arrow or some other indicator pointing you in the right direction.

You definitely wouldn't want to use Loc8tor to find a missing child at a supermarket or shopping mall. But if you're always misplacing your keys or wallet (or anything else that will remain stationary while you look for it) at home, and don't mind a slow, sonar-like room to room search, Loc8tor will help you track it down. For tracking pets and people, you're better off looking elsewhere.

Posted by [Fletch](#) on March 6, 2008 8:06 PM