

Six surprising things you can do with your smartphone

By Kim Komando, Komando.com, August 13, 2016

With more than 2 million apps in the Apple App Store and 2.2 million in Google Play, there are tons of things you can do with your smartphone beyond making calls and texting. Here are some of the most innovative apps that make your smartphone do things you've never imagined.

1. Measure your heart rate

Instant Heart Rate is an app that uses your phone's camera and flash to take a reading of your pulse. Just place your index finger on the camera and the app will automatically measure your heart rate by detecting color changes. The app also collects data from each reading to create charts that help you monitor your heart rate over time. Plus, you can add tags and notes such as "Just woke up," "Before bed," "Exercising," and "Resting," to make your tracking more effective.

You don't have to be a fitness enthusiast to benefit from this app. It's also helpful if you have a medical condition such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes and need to monitor your heart rate closely. When I tested the app, it was within a beat or two of manually measuring my heart rate.

A free basic version is available for both Apple and Android users. However, there is also a Pro version (Apple, \$2.99/Android, \$1.99) that's ad-free and offers unlimited data tracking. [Click here to learn more about Instant Heart Rate, and get download instructions.](#)

2. Hunt for treasure

One of the most unexpected things your smartphone can do is search for metal. If you own an iPhone, download a free app called Metal Detector. This app taps into your phone's built-in magnetometer, which helps your phone detect the X, Y, Z axes for things like the compass.

Metal Detector won't detect everything that's metal, but don't discredit its ability. Point your phone's camera toward the metal objects and turn up the dial to increase the intensity. You'll be surprised by the things it picks up. The app detects any metal that is magnetic.

If you don't have an iPhone, a similar app (also called Metal Detector) is available for Android devices. These apps share the same name; however, they were created by different developers and have slight differences in the way they operate. [Click here to learn more about Metal Detector.](#)

3. Control your vehicle from anywhere

Wouldn't it be great if you could warm up or cool down your car before you even reach the parking lot? That's what Viper SmartStart does. It's like turning your phone into a remote control for your vehicle.

With the full system, you can start your car, unlock your doors, open your trunk, locate where you're parked, and even activate your security system. Premium versions also include features such as text alerts for speeding and when your car has a low battery.

The apps for Apple and Android are free to download and test, but you'll need extra hardware and a monthly service plan to make the system work.

There are four different service plan options, ranging from \$70 to \$240 per year, depending on the features you select. You will also need a module installed in your car, which costs around \$300, plus installation. [Click here for a price comparison of Viper SmartStart's plans and features.](#)

4. Measure height and distance

Using your phone's camera and fancy math, the iOS app EasyMeasure estimates the distance or height of an object. Before you play around with this app, an initial calibration is required. For better results, you'll need to set the lens' height. According to the app's tutorial, the lens' height is 4 inches from your real height.

To use the app, stand up and hold your phone at eye level then aim the little arrow at the base of the object you want to measure. Using the camera's angle and your position, the app estimates the object's distance.

EasyMeasure is available for both Apple and Android users as a free download. There is also an option to upgrade to a premium version (Apple \$2.99/Android, \$.99) that is ad-free. [Click here to see more of EasyMeasure's features.](#)

5. Level objects

Here's a "handy" use for your smartphone, turn it into a leveler! iHandy Level is a free download for both iOS and Android that uses your smartphone's accelerometer to help you level objects. The app even mimics a real bubble leveler with a wooden overlay.

The leveling action works with all your phone's orientations so it's quite versatile. Use it in portrait mode, landscape mode or go hands-free and lay your phone flat on its back.

iHandy Level can help you hang picture frames, TV mounts, light fixtures and just about anything you want to straighten out.

Other features include a digital readout of the current angle and a Hold button that locks the leveler in place. [Click here to watch a video of this app in action.](#)

6. See in the dark

Thermal vision isn't something we're born with, but now it's possible to use it to see in the dark. All you need is a camera attachment, such as the Seek Thermal.

This high-resolution thermal camera attaches to your smartphone through the lightning port for Apple or micro USB port for Android. There are two different models currently available, the Compact and Compact XR.

Compact models cost around \$250 and include a 206 x 156 thermal sensor. This model is also waterproof and can detect temperatures between -40 degrees and 626 degrees Fahrenheit at a range up to 1,000 feet.

For \$300, the Compact XR model gets you a larger field of view, as well as a range of up to 1,800 feet. You'll find these products on Seek Thermal's website and on Amazon.

Seek Thermal cameras also come as an app to display the detected heat signatures on your phone screen. Use this equipment to scout and track wildlife, detect air leaks, monitor your home, find loose electrical wires, etc. [Click here to see images of the heat maps the Seek Thermal Camera produces.](#)

Bonus Tip: Speaking of smartphone tricks, did you know that you can use your phone to check remote control batteries? You'll never wonder again if the batteries are dead. [Click here for the steps on my website.](#)