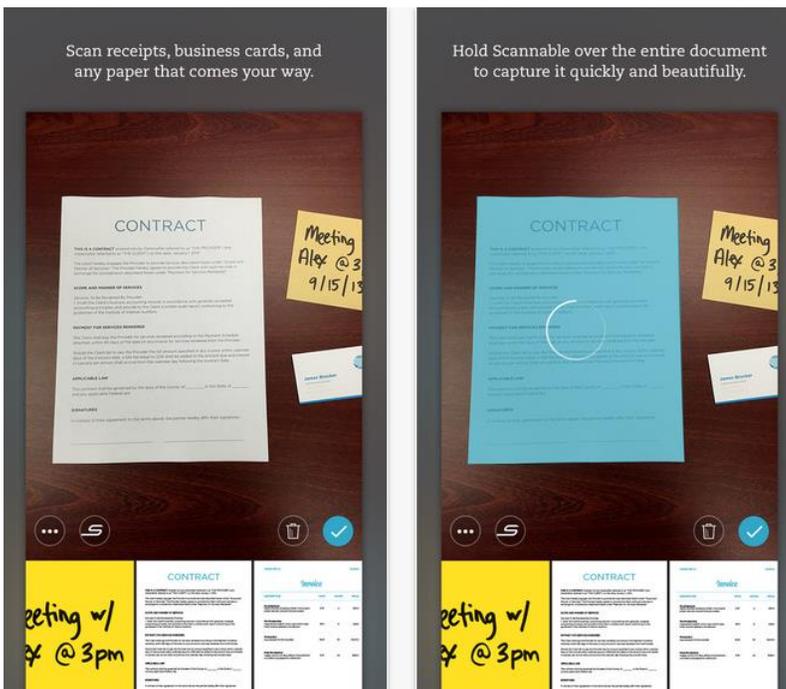# Cool ways to use your phone's camera that don't involve photos

By Komando Staff, Komando.com, June 1, 2017

> **Note: If you download this document from the PTUG Handout Website**
> **(http://www.reif.us/pcug/handouts.htm) the links in the document will be active**

Yep, that camera in your smartphone is amazing. We now live in an age where we can take high-resolution photos instantly wherever we go, satisfying our need to document our lives on a whim. Nowadays, we take this ability for granted since we could take as many photos as we want with virtually unlimited storage.

But did you know that there are plenty of other uses for your smartphone's camera?

Aside from indulging your selfie desires, nailing that wacky group shot or carefully composing your latest Instagram post, here are our picks for other ways you could use your smartphone camera other than, you know, taking actual photos.
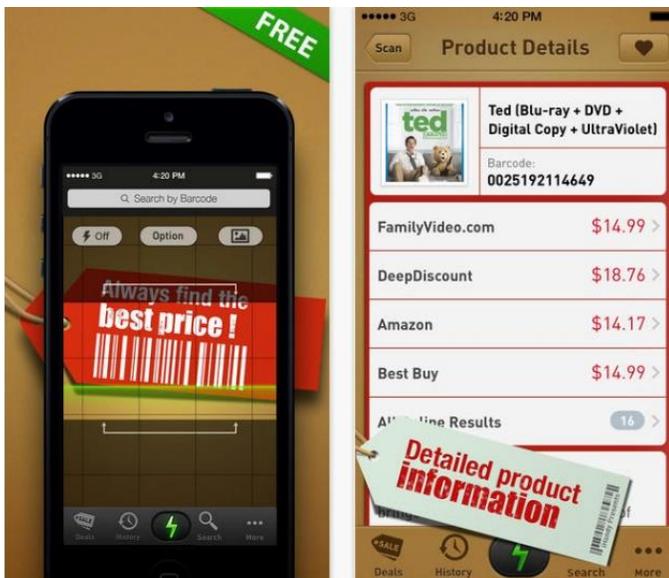
1. Scan documents

One of the most productive ways of using your smartphone's camera is to use it as a portable, pocket document scanner. Create scans of anything, be it documents, receipts, business cards, magazines and share them via email or text.

Some scanning apps even have OCR (Optical Character Reader) capability that will analyze scanned text and export them as editable PDF or text files. This is one use of your phone's camera that you would definitely want to check out.

There are lots of free and paid document scanning apps out there but one of our favorites is Evernote Scannable for iOS.

Android users could check out Google's own Google Drive. Aside from cloud storage, their app has document scanning capabilities via your device camera.
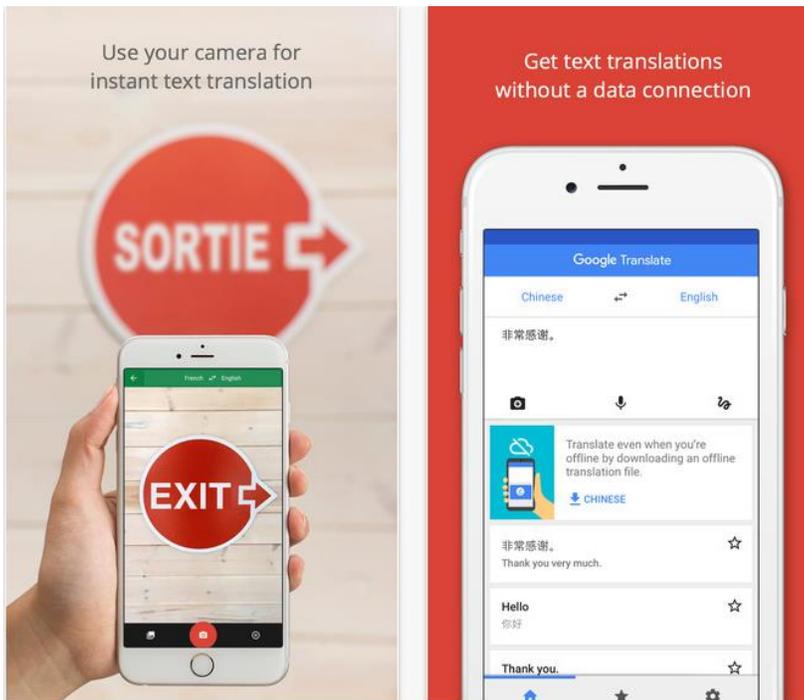
2. Look up UPC barcodes

For shopping comparisons, nothing beats a quick UPC code scanner to survey the best price available. These apps typically aggregate online and brick and mortar store prices and also provide product details and descriptions just by scanning a barcode with your device camera. Great for price matching too!

For iOS users, try Quick Scan. This app supports all commercial barcodes and they claim to have all major retailers in their database.

Android users, check out ShopSavvy's barcode scanner, which pretty much does the same thing.

Also, for Amazon shoppers, the Amazon iOS and Android app already have barcode scanning built in. Just scan a barcode and it will take you directly to the Amazon product page.

3. Translate language

Now for country hopping travelers, translation apps can be lifesavers. Ever see a foreign sign or a block of text that you need to translate in a pinch? Google Translate will do that for you in the coolest way possible.

Just aim your viewfinder at the text and the app will magically transform them into the language of your choice. Watching the words change in real time almost feels like science fiction sometimes and it definitely works like a charm.

Google Translate currently supports only 30 camera translation languages but you could always type, draw or submit pictures of text for translation. It even has instant speech translation for 32 languages by using voice recognition. Google Translate is available for both iOS and Android.
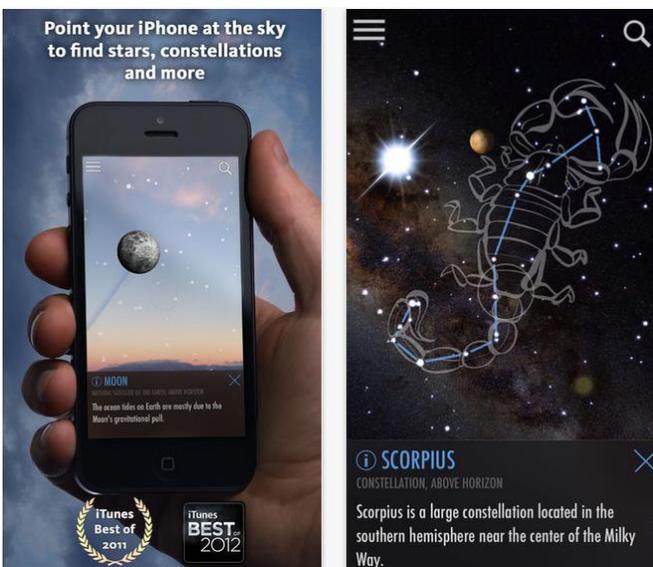
4. Augmented reality games

Here's a fun use for your smartphone camera, augmented reality gaming! Augmented reality games use the camera to create real-time, real-world backdrops for the in-game objects. For instance, ARBasketball generates a virtual hoop you could play anywhere and Bowmaster inserts targets in your real-world surroundings.

My favorite augmented reality game, though, is Zombies Everywhere! By using your device camera, this game turns your world into an apocalyptic zombie battleground. It is quite immersive seeing zombies appear and run around in familiar areas, say, on your office desk or in a hallway.

For Android, check out TableZombies for a similar augmented reality game.
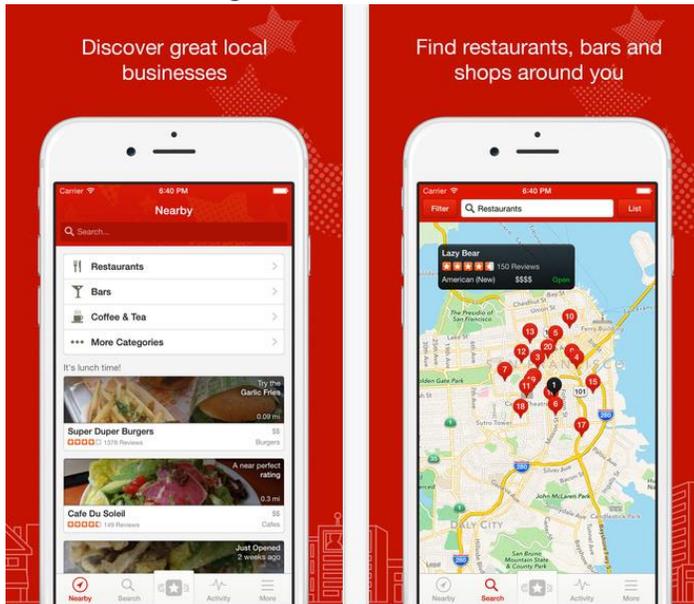
5. Stargazing

If you are a dabbler of all things astronomical, then Skyview for iOS or Android, may just be right up your alley.

Using augmented reality, this app uses your device camera to spot celestial objects. Just point your camera skyward and Skyview will guide you through constellations, galaxies, stars and even man-made satellites and their locations. It will also track the location of the sun and the moon at any chosen date, past or future.

If stargazing is your thing, then this is definitely one fun and educational way to use your smartphone camera.
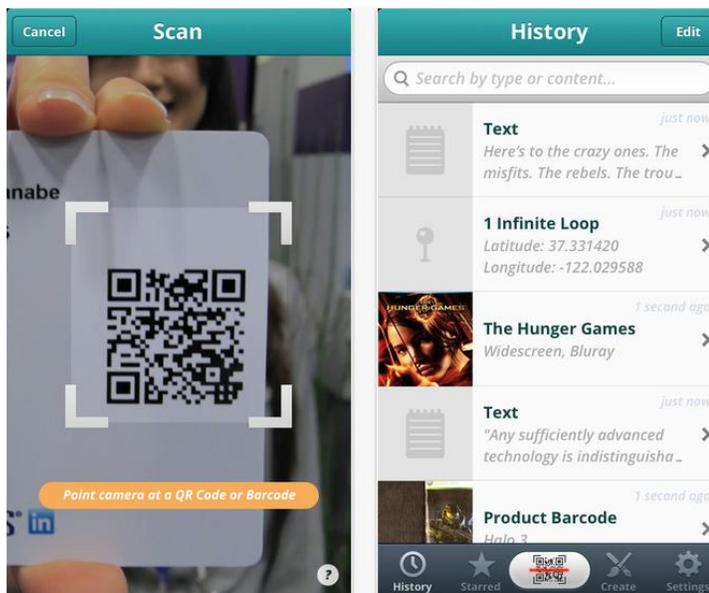
6. Location tracking

Did you know that the Yelp app has a hidden augmented reality feature called Monocle?

By using the smartphone's camera and compass, Yelp's Monocle feature overlays markers and tiles of restaurants and bars around your immediate area. By looking through Monocle's "eye," you could scan around to locate and pinpoint these establishments' exact location relative to your orientation. It also gives you the usual Yelp reviews and details.

This is quite handy if you are walking around looking for a place to hang out. Just fire up Yelp's Monocle, search for restaurants and bars, and let it guide your way.

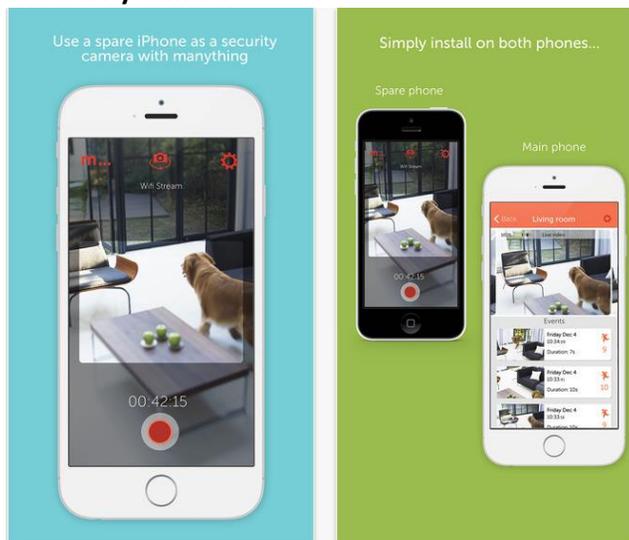The Yelp app is available for both iOS and Android.

7. Scan QR codes

Everyone has seen Quick Response codes, right? Those weird, mini-maze looking squares we keep finding everywhere. Similar to UPC codes, QR codes contain data that has embedded information when decoded. Currently, they are used more for conveniently distributing website URLs without displaying the web address. All the user needs is a QR reader on a smartphone and upon scanning the QR code, instantly opens the embedded website on a web browser.

For iOS, check out ShopSavvy's QR Code Reader and Scanner. Aside from QR codes, it also reads other commercial barcodes like UPC. It also includes a QR Code Generator if you want to create your own.

For the Android version, click here.

Note: For QR code safety, Norton has its own free QR code scanner that checks for dangerous links and phishing or malicious websites. It's available for both iOS and Android.

8. Security camera

Here's an obvious use for your old smartphones, repurpose them as motion activated security cameras.

The Manything iOS app will do precisely that. Use your smartphone camera to monitor your pets, your home, your kids, whatever your heart desires.

Manything has programmable motion detection zones, cloud-based DVR, time-lapse, live streaming, IFTTT automation and remote control capabilities. All you need is another iOS device with Manything installed (to use it as your remote viewer and controller) and you will have a low-cost, around-the-clock surveillance system.

Manything for Android shares the same features as its iOS counterpart. Check it out here.

Bonus tip
And finally here's a bonus tip I use in emergencies and it does not even require an app download.
If you are nearsighted and for some reason you can't locate your eyeglasses, just open your smartphone's camera and use the viewfinder screen to see clearly. Make your phone camera work like a bionic eye and bring everything into crystal clear focus! Think of it as digital temporary sight correction and it works like magic.