

Five incredible ways to use your smartphone's camera you never knew until now

By Kim Komando, Komando.com, February 3, 2018

Unless you're a serious photographer, you probably don't carry a digital camera anymore. There's no need: A typical smartphone comes with at least one camera, and lenses are sharper and more dynamic than ever. Even pro photojournalists often turn to their Samsung Galaxy, and entire feature films have been shot with iPhones. It's hard to believe but many people, including myself, hardly use a smartphone to make phone calls anymore. Smartphones also have an advantage that regular cameras don't, and that is apps.

Your phone's camera is a powerful tool, capable of far more than regular picture-taking. With the right apps, your phone can absorb visual information and use it for everyday tasks. You can conduct searches, tackle a shopping list, read a foreign language, or solve math problems, all with a lens the size of a marker tip.

What is your camera actually capable of? Here are five unexpected ways to use your smartphone camera.

1. Use a visual search engine

[CamFind](#) is a bit like a regular internet search site, except it uses images instead of words. The app is available for both Android and iOS phones. Open the app, snap a photo, and watch as it runs through keywords that identify what's in the picture. It will then generate a list of similar images and related search results.

CamFind doesn't always get everything exactly right, but it does take darn good guesses, and sometimes it's dead-on accurate. It will change the way you think about doing internet searches.

2. Be a power shopper

If you don't have the Amazon mobile shopping app, then you're missing out on some cool camera tricks that can make purchasing easier. Click on the camera icon in the app's search box to pull up your camera's view. From here, choose which feature you want to access. You can search for products by snapping a photo, scan a barcode, or check and redeem gift cards.

This is cool. You can also use your camera to scan the shipping label on an Amazon box and find out what's inside without opening it.

The app's augmented-reality stickers feel downright futuristic, enabling you to place digital objects into your surroundings. For example, you can see how that turntable-shaped cat scratcher would look in your living room. Naturally, you can order those items if you wish. If you're a visual person, this is a fun feature to play with.

3. Find what you're looking for with ease

You own an object, but you're not quite sure what it's called. All you know is that it looks kind of like an artist's palette and you use it to slice the leaves of kale. But how do you search for that, especially on a sprawling site like eBay?

Don't worry. The eBay app is here to help. Just open it up and look at the end of the search box for a camera icon. Touch that and choose "image search." This will open up your smartphone camera. Point it at the item you're looking for, take a photo, and crop it. The app will then search for auction listings that match the look of the item in your photo.

How accurate is eBay's image search? It does an admirable job. We tested it out by snapping a picture of a plastic fox figurine, and it returned a list of similar animal figurines. A photo of a metal storage cabinet generated a group of similar filing cabinets.

It's a great way to search eBay when you're having trouble coming up with the right keywords to describe what you're shopping for.

4. Do math by taking a picture

Math might not be your strong suit, but you don't have to reach for a calculator every time you need to put some numbers together. The [Photomath app](#) lets you point your camera at an equation and get an answer. It can even show you the steps it took to find that answer. That's a handy feature for students and people looking to improve their mathematical skills.

You can use Photomath for simple subtraction, multiplication, addition, and division problems, but it can also tackle more complex equations. It can even read your handwriting so you can scribble down your math problem and let the app hand you the solution.

5. Translate languages in real-time

You're traveling in a foreign country. Maybe you speak a smattering of the local language, or maybe you only know how to say "hello" and "where's the restroom?" With the Google Translate app, you can quickly get your bearings even if you don't speak the language.

The app's extremely nifty instant camera translation feature works in 38 different languages. Start up the app, tap on the camera icon, and point the lens at what you're trying to translate. It will magically change the text right on the screen.

This is especially handy for street and store signs or menus in restaurants. The app isn't just for Android; you can also get an iOS version. This can help turn you into a much more confident traveler.