

ON

SHARE

SHARE 8404

TWEET

COMMENT

EMAIL

JORDAN MCMAHON GEAR 11.05.17 08:00 AM

DITCH ALL THOSE OTHER MESSAGING APPS: HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD USE SIGNAL



GETTY IMAGES

STOP ME IF you've heard this before. You text a friend to finalize plans, anxiously awaiting their reply, only to get a message from them on Snapchat to say your latest story was hilarious. So, you move the conversation over to Snapchat, decide to meet up at 10:30, but then you close the app and can't remember if you agreed on meeting at Hannegan's or that poppin' new brewery downtown. You can't go back and look at the message since Snapchat messages have a short shelf life, so you send a text, but your friend has already proven to be an unreliable texter. You'd be lucky if they got back to you by midnight.

All of this illustrates a plain truth. There are just too many messaging apps. As conversations can bounce between Snapchat, iMessage, Skype, Instagram, Twitter, and Hangouts/Allo or whatever Google's latest attempt at messaging is, they're rendered confusing and unsearchable. We could stick to SMS, but it's pretty limited compared to other options, and it has some security holes. Rather than just chugging along with a dozen chat apps, letting your notifications pile up, it's time to pick one messaging app and get all of your friends on board. That way, everyone can just pick up their phones and shoot a message to anyone without hesitation.

Here comes the easy part. There's one messaging app we should all be using: Signal. It has strong encryption, it's free, it works on every mobile platform, and the developers are committed to keeping it simple and fast by not mucking up the

MOST POPULAR



SCIENCE A Brain-Eating Amoeba Just Claimed Another Victim ROBBIE GONZALEZ



SCIENCE Math Titans Clash Over Epic Proof of the ABC Conjecture ERICA KLARREICH



SPONSOR CONTENT Blueprint For Better AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS



SCIENCE San Francisco's Dream of 'Zero Waste' Lands in the Dumpster ELLEN AIRHART

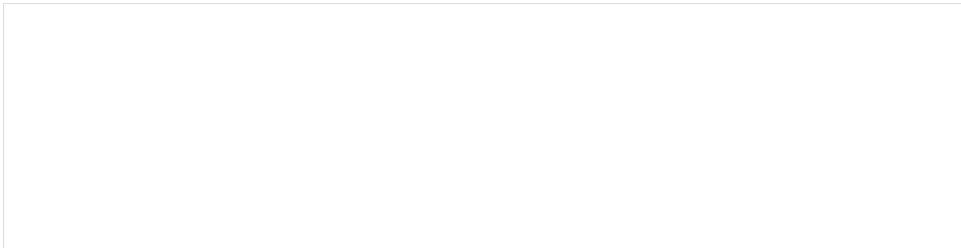
MORE STORIES

experience with ads, web-tracking, stickers, or animated poop emoji.

Tales From the Crypto

Signal looks and works a lot like other basic messaging apps, so it's easy to get started. It's especially convenient if you have friends and family overseas because, like iMessage and WhatsApp, Signal lets you sidestep expensive international SMS fees. It also supports voice and video calls, so you can cut out Skype and FaceTime. Sure, you don't get fancy stickers or games like some of the competition, but you can still send pictures, videos, and documents. It's available on iOS, Android, and desktop.

But plenty of apps have all that stuff. The thing that actually makes Signal superior is that it's easy to ensure that the contents of every chat remain private and unable to be read by anyone else. As long as both parties are using the app to message each other, every single message sent with Signal is [encrypted](#). Also, the encryption Signal uses is available under an open-source license, so [experts](#) have had the chance to test and poke the app to make sure it stays as secure as what's intended.



If you're super concerned about messages being read by the wrong eyes, Signal lets you force individual conversations to delete themselves after a designated amount of time. Signal's security doesn't stop at texts. All of your calls are encrypted, so nobody can listen in. Even if you have nothing to hide, it's nice to know that your private life is kept, you know, private.

WhatAbout WhatsApp

Yes, this list of features sounds a lot like [WhatsApp](#). It's true, the Facebook-owned messaging app has over a billion users, offers most of the same features, and even employs [Signal's encryption](#) to keep chats private. But WhatsApp raises a few concerns that Signal doesn't. First, it's owned by Facebook, a company whose primary interest is in collecting information about you to sell you ads. That alone may steer away those who feel Facebook already knows too much about us. Even though the content of your WhatsApp messages are encrypted, Facebook can [still extract](#)

metadata from your habits, like who you're talking to and how frequently.

Still, if you use WhatsApp, chances are you already know a lot of other people who are using it. Getting all of them to switch to Signal is highly unlikely. And you know, that's OK—WhatsApp really is the next-best option to Signal. The encryption is just as strong, and while it isn't as cleanly stripped of extraneous features as Signal, that massive user base makes it easy to reach almost anyone in your contact list.

Chat Heads

While we're talking about Facebook, it's worth noting that the company's Messenger app isn't the

safest place to keep your conversations. Aside from all the clutter inside the app, the two biggest issues with Facebook Messenger are that you have to encrypt conversations individually by flipping on the "Secret Conversations" option (good luck remembering to do that), and that anyone with a Facebook profile can just search for your name and send you a message. (Yikes!) There are too many variables in the app, and a lot the security is out of your hands. iMessage may seem like a solid remedy to all of these woes, but it's tucked behind Apple's walled iOS garden, so you're bound to leave out your closest friends who use Android devices. And if you ever [switch platforms](#), say bye-bye to your chat history.

Signal isn't going to win a lot of fans among those who've grown used to the more novel features inside their chat apps. There are no stickers, and no animoji. Still, as privacy issues come to the fore in the minds of users, and as mobile messaging options proliferate, and as notifications pile up, everyone will be searching for a path to sanity. It's easy to invite people to Signal. Once you're using it, just tap the "invite" button inside the chat window, and your friend will be sent a link to download the app. Even stubborn people who only send texts can get into it—Signal can be set as your phone's default SMS client, so the pain involved in the switch is minimal.

So let's make a pact right now. Let's all switch to Signal, keep our messages private, and finally put an end to the untenable multi-app shuffle that's gone on far too long.

RELATED VIDEO

SECURITY

How to Get Started with Encrypted Messaging

It's 2017! It's time to start using an encrypted messaging app. Why?