

As we near the “spookiest” time of the year (or, in this writer’s opinion, the most massively uninteresting time of the year), it’s important to remember that technology can be “spooky” all year long! For every vital application, there are about 100 others that range from superfluous to as terrifying as whatever the flavor of the month is at movie theaters this Halloween (did we really need a reboot of *The Predator*, or *Halloween*, or *Child’s Play*, or...). This month, I have one **Must Have** app that is certainly a treat alongside one **Must Avoid** app that is among the nastiest tricks out there today.

Must Have



Life 360

Available On: Android and iOS Devices

Price: Free (w/ premium subscriptions optional)

One of the most impressive (and terrifying) capabilities of smart devices is the potential to locate anyone and anything in the world with the press of a button. Take a picture? Your phone can show you on a map where you took it. Post a new status on Facebook? Your phone can identify the city and state from which you sent the update. In a lot of applications, these features are tertiary: Silly additions that have the potential to do more harm than good. Life 360, on the other hand, puts the location tracking feature included in most smart devices to good use.

Within only a few minutes of setting up Life 360, you can remotely track all of the members of your family (or your friends, if you are the clingy type) as they go throughout their day. I downloaded the app to test it with my wife, and it was pretty amazing how quickly and efficiently it worked. This morning, I started the software and watched my wife’s commute to work. Later today, I’ll get a notification when she beats me home and starts to watch *The Good Place* without me. I don’t have kids, of course, so the utility of this app is mostly lost on me; however, I can only imagine how much peace of mind this could provide parents who are worried about the first driver in the family or parents who just sent their kid to a friend’s house to spend the night for the first time.

The free version of Life 360 lets you create a “Circle,” which is just a group of individuals you agree to share your information with, and establish two locations (“Home” and “Work”) that trigger notifications when someone in your Circle arrives at them. This is pretty limited, as most

couples probably don't work together and most kids don't go to "Work," but it still allows you to monitor the day-to-day movements of close family and friends. For a monthly fee of \$2.99, you can add unlimited locations. Pay a little bit more (\$7.99/month) and you can collect statistics on drivers in your family, which could be especially useful for the "I have a teenager with a lead foot" demographic.

As with all tracking applications, there are some privacy concerns with Life 360. For the most part, I don't think it is much of a risk; you can only track the locations of people with whom you have shared a very specific code, and you have to agree to be tracked by anyone who joins your Circle. I suppose if someone stole your phone, spoofed your fingerprint (or cloned a mask of your face) to unlock your phone, and then opened the app they could see everything, but that in itself is a pretty far fetched concern.

Overall, I'm pretty impressed with Life 360, and I think I will keep it on my phone at least for the duration of this season of *The Good Place*.

Must Avoid



imo

Available On: Android and iOS Devices

Price: Free (w/ premium upgrades optional)

I'm a millennial, and - believe you me - I know we have problems. Chief among those issues is our unending desire to stick devices in front of our mugs so we can record every mundane thing that happens to us throughout the day. App developers have been all too willing to indulge our ludicrous inclinations, which is why something like **imo** could not only exist but also become the seventh highest rated social media app on Apple's app store.

In many ways, imo is not unlike other pieces of software that support multimedia communication between users. When you start the app, it asks for permission to use your contacts, your camera, and your microphone so you can immediately start chatting with your best friends no matter where they are in the world. What makes imo unique (and something that you should avoid) is the instant access to countless unmoderated live streams that it grants its users.

After a little less than two minutes, I had created an imo account (it **only** requires your phone number) and found myself in front of some highly questionable content. You see, imo prohibits certain things (like language, pornography, etc.), but it doesn't really do anything to police that. Practically every stream was some combination of bannable offenses strewn together in a way that should make any reasonable adult cringe. I tried to report one of the streams for the purpose of this column; the option doesn't exist.

Last month, I featured **Twitch**, an app that similarly allows access to countless livestreams. For as little as Twitch does to moderate its community, it *at least* does rudimentary things like implement an age gate to try and keep children out. Imo does no such thing outside of a paltry disclaimer that the app is for individuals "13 years and older." Given what I've seen, I wouldn't recommend imo for anyone, regardless of age. Adults can find better livestreams *literally anywhere* (they are so common that I think I tripped over a livestream walking to my car this morning), and children really shouldn't be in the market for this kind of thing, anyways.