

Just in time for Black Friday: students turn iPhone into barcode scanner

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Comparing prices over the Internet has become a common practice for consumers. Now, just in time for Black Friday, a group of Missouri University of Science and Technology students is putting that ability to comparison-shop in the palm of your hand.

The Missouri S&T students have created an application for the [iPhone](#) that turns the device into a [barcode](#) scanner. Using image-processing techniques and the iPhone's camera, the application - called [barcodescan](#) - reads a product's Universal Product Code (UPC), then scours the Internet for prices, product reviews and other online information about that product.

The system should come in handy for iPhone users who are browsing at a bricks-and-mortar store and see a product they're interested in

researching.

"Users can even save results into custom lists, which can then be shared with friends," says Paul Parham, a senior in engineering management who is coordinating the product's release. Parham is one of several students developing digital products and services through a company called the Interdisciplinary Design Collaborative, or IDC for short. IDC was created in September 2008 by Michael A. Orlando, a senior in electrical engineering and interdisciplinary engineering.

"We found a poor selection of applications for the iPhone that can read one-dimensional barcodes, so we set out to make our own," says Parham.

An early test version of the app, available for free to iPhone users, has been downloaded more than 250,000 times, Parham says. A more robust version, originally priced at \$4.99, is now available for 99 cents "for the holiday shopping season," Parham says. The app may be downloaded via the iPhone's app store or from iTunes.

IDC recently released another iPhone [app](#) that lets users know how many days before Missouri S&T's next annual St. Pat's Celebration. The St. Pat's "Daze" application is of particular interest to Missouri S&T students and alumni, since the St. Pat's event has been an annual celebration on campus since 1908.

"We wanted to make something to let everybody know there was someone on campus making iPhone apps," says Orlando, a St. Louis County native who is also pursuing a master's degree in engineering management at S&T. "We thought, 'What better way than St. Pat's to get everybody's attention?'"

Orlando, who currently serves as the company's chief executive officer, began IDC in 2008 with the idea of providing a way for Missouri S&T

students to put their technological talents to work.

"We saw that there were a bunch of students working minimum-wage jobs around town, and we saw them as an untapped resource for developing new products," Orlando says. He worked with the university's Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) to develop a business plan and get the company off the ground.

"I was skeptical at first" about Orlando's plans, says Barry White, director of the SBTDC. "We see students every week that are looking to start their own business, but these guys are classic overachievers and they proved they would make it happen."

Two other students also hold executive positions with the company: R.J. Miller, a senior in interdisciplinary engineering and graduate student in engineering management, who is the chief administrative officer, and Colby Hall, an MBA graduate student, who is the chief operating officer. Ten Missouri S&T students are on the IDC payroll.

Provided by Missouri University of Science and Technology ([news](#) : [web](#))

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