

Keeping your hands on the wheel, off the keyboard

January 25 2011, By Bridget Carey

In our continuing series on tech to help meet your New Year's resolutions, we hope you vowed in 2011 to quit the dangerous habit of texting while driving. If willpower alone is not enough, there are a few smart-phone programs that can help.

iPhone users, however, are pretty much on their own. That's because the iPhone doesn't currently support an app that can turn incoming text messages to audio and let a user dictate a response. Nor is there anything that can block the phone from being alerted to messages if it's traveling in a car - something that's possible with [smart phones](#). But some app makers have given it a shot:

-Text'nDrive Pro (iPhone, BlackBerry, \$9.99): The iPhone version only works with e-mails, not text messages. BlackBerry will allow for reading and answering text messages aloud. The iPhone version I tested would read the beginning of a new e-mail and allow the user to record an audio clip to attach as a reply. But it's glitchy, often crashes and didn't always read every e-mail.

-SafeCellapp (iPhone, Android, \$11.99): SafeCell motivates you to behave by turning safe [driving](#) into a game. Don't text or mess with the phone, and you'll earn points for gift certificates. Do anything at all - even answer a call using a hands-free device - and you'll lose points. The driver would have to rack up at least 1,500 error-free miles (good for Amazon gift certificates) to make up for the cost of the app. Only the Android version has an option to eliminate temptation by blocking alerts

for texts and phone calls.

-Vlingo ([iPhone](#), BlackBerry, Android, Nokia, free): Upgrades that allow dictation of text messages and e-mails start at \$6.99. With them, Vlingo lets a user dictate a text or Facebook update. ("Text Mom. Message: I'll be late for dinner tonight"), but you still have to look at the screen to press "send." Android users can turn on SafeReader so Vlingo automatically reads incoming messages aloud. Vlingo is in the process of launching InCar, making the whole process hands-free, including telling the phone to send, but it's only available on some Sprint phones so far.

-MotoSpeak (Android): To listen to text messages and reply orally, it'll require a phone that runs Android 2.2 and either the Motorola Roadster car speakerphone (\$99.99) or Motorola earpieces Finiti or CommandOne (\$129.99). When a [text message](#) arrives, the Bluetooth device will read it aloud and ask if the user wants to dictate a reply, no screen-touching required.

Have no willpower or want an app that will restrict your teen? There are password-protected programs that do just that (but will always allow a 911 call).

-iZUP (Android, BlackBerry, \$19.99 a year): This app shuts down the phone's ability to text, browse the Web or call while the car is in motion. And there's no "cheating" at a stop light, since it needs to be motionless for several minutes.

-ZoomSafer (Android, BlackBerry, \$25 a year): This slightly more flexible option lets a user make and receive calls with a hands-free device.

-PhoneGuard ([Android](#), [BlackBerry](#), \$29.99 a year): This app is tough on teens. Aside from blocking a phone from texting and making calls (it can

receive a call with a hands-free device), it will tattle to mom and dad as soon as you go over their set speed limit. Parents can also block the phone from texting at certain times of the day, e.g., school hours or late at night.

You don't need to spend money on a yearly subscription if you use the best program of all - self-control. Studies show [texting](#) while driving makes you much more likely to get in an accident. So just turn the phone off. Hide it in the glove box. Wait to text back until the car is parked. Technology alone can't stop people from doing stupid things.

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Citation: Keeping your hands on the wheel, off the keyboard (2011, January 25) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-01-wheel-keyboard.html>

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