

## Sixth-grader's barking-dog app wins AT&T \$20,000 prize

September 25 2012, by Nancy Owano

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(Phys.org)—Not bad for an 11-year old who likes math. In fact, not bad for an adult agency creative director who liked the 11-year-old's idea and sat alongside her for some serious collaboration. They both won a \$20,000 prize for the best don't-text app. AT&T recently held a hackathon in Los Angeles to promote its don't text-while driving "It Can Wait" campaign. Participants were asked to develop an app that discourages people from texting and driving.

"Whether you are a backend person and code in Ruby/PHP/.NET or are a designer and only work with Illustrator," said the AT&T invitation, "you are invited to attend this event. Every group needs a good balance of talent and your development skills are needed."

The challenge for the 120 people who showed up at the event was to

create a winning software [app](#) idea for discouraging texting while [driving](#). AT&T provided some support for contestants with presentations and code samples "to help bootstrap" their work.

David Grau, a creative director and designer at WLDG, an interactive agency in Santa Ana, and 11-year-old Victoria Walker walked off with the prize, which AT&T awarded them so that they can bring their idea to market.

The winning idea from Grau and Walker is called [Rode Dog](#), an application that allows friends and family to organize themselves into a pack, in keeping with the dog metaphor, to monitor text-messaging actions by any one of the pack's members. A GPS tracks the location of each person in the pack at all times and alerts users whenever someone in the pack is texting and driving at the same time. When an app user spots a fellow group member texting, then the user can initiate a barking noise on the offender's phone. The app is designed to force the driver to stop texting because the app's annoying bark will not stop unless the offender acknowledges it and quits texting while driving.

Grau and Walker were among five semifinalists. Walker, who is in the sixth grade, first came up with the idea of relentlessly barking dogs because she thought of her own three dogs barking—a husky, a Rottweiler and a chihuahua. Perhaps enough said. The intention in her mind was indeed to bother the driver with barks until texting stopped.

Those supporting her idea said it was in the same spirit as seat-belt ringing sounds that bother the user until he or she resorts to compliance. Walker and Grau hope an enhanced app will be up and running on storefronts for Android, iOS, and Windows Phone in the coming months.

The event strengthens AT&T's campaign message that texting while

driving is dangerous. According to an AT&T Wireless survey, 75 percent of teenagers said it was common for their friends to text while driving. Over 100,000 automobile accidents a year involve a driver [texting](#). Another factoid stressed is that drivers who text while they drive are 23 times more likely to be in an accident.

**More information:** [itcanwait.com/](http://itcanwait.com/)

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