

Review: 3 weather phone apps help you on the go

December 5 2012, by Anick Jesdanun



This screenshot shows WeatherBug's app for mobile phone. The app's home screen crams a lot of useful information without clutter. The app shows you a graphical forecast for upcoming days, today plus five days for Android and two

for the iPhone. (AP Photo/WeatherBug)

(AP)—For me, climate change is a serious issue. No, I'm not referring to the debate over global warming. My concerns are much simpler. I'm constantly checking the weather for the hours and days ahead because deciding to hike on a rainy day or neglecting to dress warmly can put a damper on a vacation.

During recent travels, I tried several free [weather](#) apps for the [iPhone](#) and Android phones. (Versions for [tablet computers](#) also are available, but I didn't test those extensively.)

I didn't try to determine which is more accurate at predicting the weather. They are all generally good, but not error-free. Rather, I evaluated each based on features and ease of use.

The ones I tested operate similarly on iPhones and Android phones, though there are some differences in how information gets presented or accessed. Here's a look at three apps I recommend:

The [Weather Channel](#)

When you open this app, the home screen presents you with current conditions, including temperature, humidity, wind, visibility, UV index (a gauge of the strength of [ultraviolet radiation](#)) and dew point (which I have yet to figure out a use for). You also get information on sunrise and sunset times.

Navigating the tabs, you get hourly forecasts for the next 24 hours on the

iPhone and 15 on the Android. On both, you get daily forecasts for the next 10 days. The Android version doesn't include dates, so you're left to figure out whether Saturday means this Saturday or next weekend. Click on "36 Hour" for brief written summaries for today, tonight and tomorrow.

The map shows you the radar for your region, giving you an idea of how far away a storm might be. During my travels, I've used this feature to gauge how quickly heavy rain might pass. You can switch that to show cloud cover instead of radar, or show both. You can also add details such as rain or snow over the past 24 hours.

You can check weather anywhere in the U.S. by entering a city name or ZIP (area) code. Or click on a target icon for the weather where you are, as determined by your phone. There's a location icon at the bottom of the Android version. On the iPhone, you're left to figure out that you need to click on the magnifying glass or the "i" button for settings. Flick the screen left or right to check weather in other locations you have stored.

The app also offers video of weather forecasts and news, with those from your city or region coming up first. There are tools for seeing what people are saying about the weather on Twitter and for sharing your weather-related photos and video. The app offers a pollen report; the iPhone version has hurricane and maritime conditions, too. The Weather Channel says that information is coming to Android next year, along with longer hourly forecasts.

Conclusion: You get lots of information on current conditions and the most options of the three for viewing maps. Limiting hourly forecasts to 24 hours or less is stingy. On The Weather Channel's website, I get two days of hourly forecasts.



This screenshot shows the Weather Channel's app for mobile phones. The app offers video of weather forecasts and news, with those from your city or region coming up first. There are also tools for seeing what people are saying about the weather on Twitter and for sharing your weather-related photos and video. (AP Photo/Weather Channel)

AccuWeather

The home screen also offers temperature, humidity, wind, UV index and visibility conditions, plus sunrise and sunset. The Android version lists wind gusts, not just wind speeds. The iPhone version has information on dew point, while Android does not.

AccuWeather goes beyond The Weather Channel in offering 15 days of forecasts, not just 10, and offers dates on both the iPhone and Android. Its extended forecasts are also more detailed than the Weather Channel's. You can click on a day to get those details.

Comparable with The Weather Channel, AccuWeather offers just 24 hours of hourly forecasts on its app. By contrast, you get more than three days on its website, and even more with a paid subscription.

AccuWeather has more details than The Weather Channel for each hour, though you're left to figure out where to flick and touch to get those details.

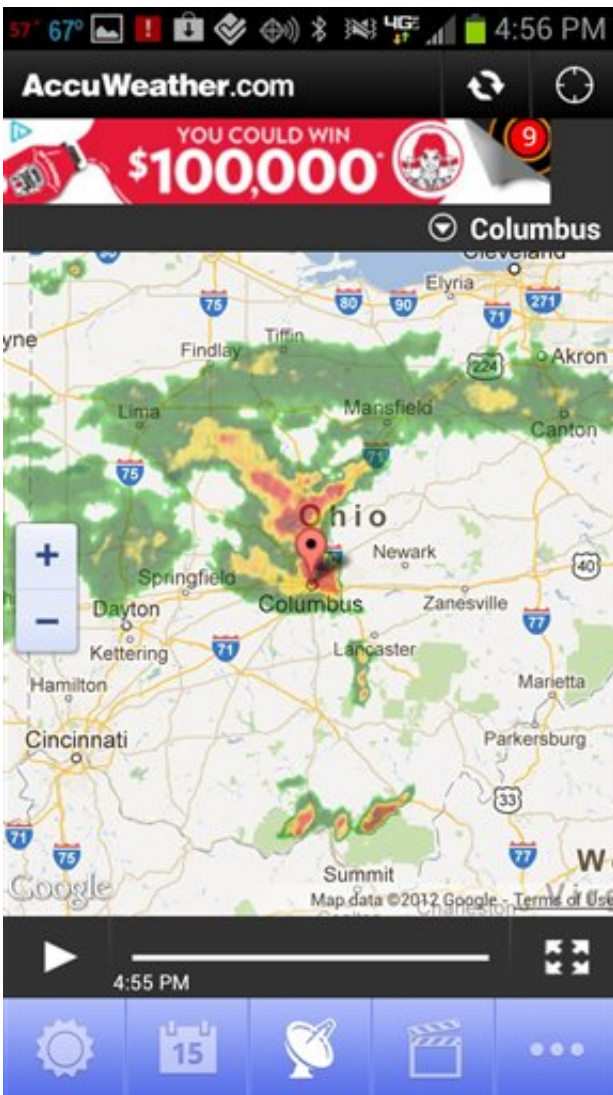
AccuWeather's map is adequate, but doesn't offer as many options as The Weather Channel's.

As for location, the Android version has a target icon on the home screen (it's buried in the other apps) to quickly pull up information on where you are. That button is not coming to the iPhone for another few months, so for now, the location is harder to change. Unlike the other apps I tried, AccuWeather doesn't offer suggestions as you start typing in the name of a city to switch locations. With big fingers on a small touch keyboard, I had to type "Sault Ste. Marie" in its entirety for the sister cities in Michigan and Ontario.

Like The Weather Channel, AccuWeather offers local, regional and national video. AccuWeather has special forecasts for certain types of activities—such as golfing, bicycling and lawn mowing—as well as risks for asthma, flu and migraines. However, you're just given a one-word

assessment, such as "poor" or "excellent," with no clues as to why it might be a horrible day to run or ski.

Conclusion: The app could be better with its hourly forecasts. It also ought to be easier to change locations. The activities forecasts show promise, though I long for more details. AccuWeather promises some of these desired features in a few months. AccuWeather has typically been my first stop for weather information on a regular computer, but the app leaves me wanting for now—unless I'm looking for extended forecasts.



This screenshot shows AccuWeather.com's app for mobile phones. The home screen also offers temperature, humidity, wind, UV index and visibility conditions, plus sunrise and sunset. The Android version lists wind gusts, not just wind speeds. The iPhone version has information on dew point, while Android does not. (AP Photo/AccuWeather.com)

WeatherBug

This app's home screen crams a lot of useful information without clutter. That screen doesn't give you as much detail as the others on current conditions. Humidity, dew point and UV index are missing from the Android version, and neither version has information on visibility, sunset or sunrise. What you get instead is a graphical forecast for upcoming days—today plus five days for Android and two for the iPhone.

Touch on the forecast section for additional days and details—though you get only seven in all, the fewest of the three apps. Click on any day for written summaries of day and evening forecasts. Then click on that for hourly forecasts. Yes, that means nearly seven days of hourly forecasts, not the stingy 24 hours (or less) offered by the other two.

WeatherBug's radar map is OK, but not as versatile as The Weather Channel's.

WeatherBug doesn't have a target icon on the Android version to help you quickly get weather for where you are, but it's not really needed. On both the iPhone and [Android](#), weather automatically updates to your current location when you have GPS enabled.

Switching locations or adding one by city or ZIP code is relatively easy, but only the iPhone version offers suggestions as you type. Once you enter a city, you can narrow your choice to a specific school, airport or other weather monitoring station. WeatherBug has placed more than 10,000 of these across the country. The others offer localized weather by analyzing available data from government and private sources. From my office in New York, I can get current conditions at a nearby school rather than a Central Park station 1.6 miles farther away.

Video is limited to national forecasts, but still images from several nearby locations let you see for yourself whether it's raining. A recent update to the WeatherBug app adds such specialty forecasts as golfing, pollen and dry skin. There aren't as many choices as AccuWeather's app, but you get more details for the ones that are available.

Conclusion: I find WeatherBug to be the easiest to use of the three, and I love the extended hourly forecasts. It's a good choice as long as you're not looking for a lot of video and a forecast beyond seven days.

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