

Uber takes its app down new road with redesign

November 2 2016, by Michael Liedtke



In this Dec. 16, 2014, file photo a man leaves the headquarters of Uber in San Francisco. Uber is taking its ride-hailing app down a new road in an effort to make it smarter, simpler and more fun to use. The redesigned app also will seek to mine personal information stored on smartphones in a change that could raise privacy concerns, even though it will be up to individual users to let Uber peer into their calendars and address books.(AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

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The change represents the biggest overhaul in four years to Uber's popular app, which is used by millions of people to summon cars in more than 450 cities around the world for rides that are usually cheaper than traditional taxis.

But as Uber has grown, the app has been adding features that have made it more difficult to navigate. The new design and features are designed to save passengers time and money. The new app will begin to roll out Wednesday, though it could take a couple weeks before all users get the update.

As part of the new look, Uber will spell out more clearly how long it will take and how much it will cost to reach a destination in different types of available cars. The app will also recommend the best places to be picked up in congested areas.

The reprogrammed app also will study a rider's traveling history and list frequently ordered destinations as "shortcuts."

In another time-saving move that will test how much users trust the San Francisco company with their personal information, users will be able to give the app access to their calendars so addresses listed in an entry can automatically appear in the Uber app near the time of the appointment. Uber plans to introduce this option by next month.

Starting in December, Uber will also seek access to users' personal contacts so they can ask for a ride to where a friend currently is, even if the friend isn't home. If this feature is activated, Uber's app will contact

the friend to ask if he or she is willing to share the current location. If the friend doesn't have the Uber app, the request will be sent through a text message to the mobile number listed in the address book.

Uber says it doesn't expect privacy objections because users will have to agree to allow the app to scan their calendars and address books. And people whose locations are being sought through the new address-book feature will be able to decide if they want to share the information.

The redesigned app also will offer other features from other services that Uber riders might enjoy during the trip to their destination. The additions include the ability to check out restaurant reviews through Yelp, send messages through Snapchat and listen to music on Pandora.

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