

# Understanding WhatsApp – The Most Popular Messaging App In The World



*Photo from Pexels.*

With over [2 billion users](#), WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app in the world. It has had this title since as early as 2015 when it reached [900 million monthly active users](#).

Apart from its immense popularity, WhatsApp also offers one of the most secure messaging & video call experiences out there.

If you aren't using WhatsApp already, does this mean that you should hop onto the train right now? Well, not necessarily. Although WhatsApp is an excellent messaging app, it may not be the right choice for you. But it's actually very unlikely that WhatsApp won't be able to meet your needs.

To help you decide if WhatsApp is worth your time and precious storage space on your smartphone, let's have a look at what this app has to offer to its users!

## What Is WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is a messaging and video call app released in January 2009. Originally, it wasn't even supposed to be a messaging app.

One of the main ideas of WhatsApp founder Jan Koum was to [have statuses next to the names of users](#). Essentially, the original WhatsApp was to be an app that would alert your friends of what you were doing or what you had on your mind.

Aside from that, Koum strongly believed that the then 7 months old Apple App Store would give a beginning to a huge industry of apps. And he turned out to be right.

The early months of WhatsApp have been challenging – the original app was buggy and tended to crash, and it didn't launch as strongly as Koum had hoped. Koum even thought of giving up, but the June 2009 update to iPhones that added push notifications gave new life to WhatsApp.

After a quick update, WhatsApp started notifying everyone of status changes in their contact network. Users started communicating with each other with statuses like "I'm on my way". Essentially, WhatsApp became an instant messaging platform while not technically being one.

Soon after that, WhatsApp 2.0 with chat functionality was released, quickly gaining 250,000 active users. Part of the reason for this success was that there were only three other free texting services out there. Additionally, WhatsApp uniquely allowed people to use their phone numbers as their login.

Fast-forward to February 2014 when [Facebook acquired WhatsApp for \\$19 billion](#). At the time, WhatsApp had over 200 million users. Soon, the app's key component – end-to-end encryption for ultimate safety and privacy – was added as well.

In 2015, WhatsApp became the world's most popular messaging app with [900 million active monthly users](#).

In 2016, WhatsApp [dropped its annual subscription fee of \\$1 and became free](#). At the time, founder Jan Koum said that no ads would appear on the platform to compensate for the pricing change. Well, we indeed haven't seen any ads so far, but that [may change in 2020](#).

And over the following years, WhatsApp has multiplied its user base, reaching [2 billion users](#) by February 2020.

## What Can WhatsApp Do For You?

Finally, the features of WhatsApp – here's what this app can do:

- **Chat.** WhatsApp allows you to send messages to your contacts free of charge over the internet. Chat is available one-to-one and in groups. You connect with others via their phone numbers, meaning that no one can message or call you unless they have your phone number.
- **Voice messages.** You may send short voice messages in WhatsApp too.
- **Audio/video calls.** You may call up to 8 contacts with audio and/or video. WhatsApp also allows you to join Messenger Rooms with up to 50 participants.
- **File sharing.** WhatsApp lets you share photos, videos, documents, PDFs, and other files no larger than 100 MB.
- **Location sharing.** Much like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp allows you to share your live location with your contacts, as well as point out custom locations on the map.
- **Statuses.** You may add text or photo/video statuses to your WhatsApp profile. The latter statuses are very much like Instagram or Facebook Stories.

- **Payments.** You may also send money to other WhatsApp users. The feature is available in a limited number of countries, but it will gradually roll out in more and more locations.
- **WhatsApp Business.** The Business app allows business owners to showcase their products and services and also connect with customers that are using the standard WhatsApp application.
- **Mobile, desktop, and web clients.** WhatsApp is geared toward mobile devices, but it's also available on macOS & Windows computers and web browsers. With that said, keep in mind that WhatsApp isn't officially available on iPad and iPod devices.
- **No ads.** WhatsApp has never had any ads, which allowed it to retain a clean and light user interface. But this [may change in 2020](#).

### WhatsApp security

WhatsApp's strongest suit is its [security](#). Initially, the app has been criticized for the lack of encryption, but it has been added pretty soon after release – in May 2012.

Today, WhatsApp is considered one of the most secure messaging apps thanks to end-to-end encryption in all forms of within-app communication.

For those less tech-savvy, essentially, end-to-end encryption ensures that only you and the recipient have access to the contents of your messages. Neither WhatsApp, nor law enforcement, nor anybody else can decrypt the information that you send to your contacts.

This is excellent news for the average user. However, the inaccessibility of WhatsApp conversations for law enforcement agencies has caused strong critique, particularly because of several terrorist attacks that may have been prevented had WhatsApp been more open.

WhatsApp has been used by terrorists to [plot the November 2015 Paris attack](#), [before and after the 2017 Stockholm attack](#), and [minutes before the 2017 Westminster attack](#).

This is a rather complex issue, partially because if law enforcement has a backdoor to WhatsApp conversations, then hackers may also be able to gain access to user data. And if there is a way to access end-to-end encrypted messages, then there's no longer any point in that type of encryption.

For the time being though, the security of WhatsApp is unlikely to change because Mark Zuckerberg has expressed [his dedication to ensuring privacy-focused social networking](#).

### Who Is WhatsApp Best For?

First and foremost, WhatsApp would be an excellent choice if you are worried about security and privacy.

Although the likes of Skype, Facebook Messenger, and Zoom have optional end-to-end encryption, WhatsApp is one of the few apps that have this security feature enabled for every form of communication by default.

Next, WhatsApp could serve as a lighter and more secure alternative to Facebook Messenger. It shares its core features with Messenger – including location sharing and payments – while leaving out gimmicks like Instant Games.

WhatsApp wouldn't be great, however, if a sizable share of your contacts prefers to communicate via Windows or macOS computers. Although WhatsApp is available on laptops and desktop computers, it needs to be synchronized with mobile WhatsApp and cannot operate independently.

## How To Get Started With WhatsApp?

To start using WhatsApp, hop onto your mobile device's app marketplace – App Store on iOS or Google Play on Android – and install the app.

Keep in mind that WhatsApp requires at least Android 4.0.3 or iOS 9.0. From iOS devices, only iPhones are officially supported too.

Upon the first launch of the app, you will be prompted to enter your mobile phone number. You will receive an SMS with a verification code that you will need to type in the app to complete registration.

Phone numbers are used for user identification – calls and messages are all being sent via the internet, so your cellular minutes stay untouched.

After that, connect with your friends or family via their phone numbers and start chatting through WhatsApp!

## Final Words

WhatsApp is at least worth a try, and it will likely captivate you with its security, easiness of use, and the ad-free experience (at least, for now).

Potential drawbacks for some users could be its strong aim at mobile devices and the inability of independent operation on Windows or macOS computers. But so many people use smartphones these days that this is unlikely to be an issue.