



## Waze

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**T**his summer, Google completed the acquisition of Waze, an Israeli mobile navigation software startup, for over a billion dollars. As [Apple learned](#) the hard way, Google Maps has established itself as a remarkably accurate and usable mobile navigation app, so there must be something special about the Waze app. Could ministries benefit from it, or are there hidden dangers we need to be wary of?

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### What is Waze?

As implied above, Waze is both a company and a mobile app.

Or at least, Waze was a company, until Google acquired them. (By the way, the company's 100 employees received an average of \$1.2M from the deal, which could be another column on the power and danger of instant riches.) The company was founded in 2008 in Israel and was acquired in June by Google.

The Waze app runs on iOS, Android, Windows Mobile, Blackberry, and Symbian devices. It provides mapping and navigation functions similar to Google Maps and other navigation apps. However, Waze took a different approach to mapping

and navigation than other mapping companies, and that's what makes it special. Waze leverages mobile, social, big data, and gamification elements to make mapping better.

Actually, the Waze approach resulted in a mapping app that initially was worse than existing products, but in a way that Clayton Christensen would describe as "[disruptive innovation](#)." A key principal established at Waze's founding was that they wouldn't pay to license map data, so the app started with very basic map data available for free – such as the Tiger data available from the U.S. Census Bureau. In fact, according to Wikipedia, Waze currently only has complete maps for 13 countries, unlike leading mapping and naviga-



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tion apps which cover most of the world.

But, as more people use Waze, the software gets better. The software is constantly collecting anonymous information, such as location and speed. That helps Waze get better at routing people to the fastest way to their destination. Users can also manually improve the maps, naming streets, fixing house numbers, marking one way restrictions and turn restrictions, indicating whether two roads cross as a junction or an overpass, etc. Drivers can also use the app to provide real time information about traffic jams, construction, accidents, police speed traps, and gas prices.

## What is good about Waze?

Apparently, Google believed that Waze's approach would create a better navigation app than Google's own approach. Waze has many loyal fans who already believe it is the best.

From a ministry perspective, we can certainly appreciate an app that improves the driving experience. Avoiding construction, accidents, and traffic jams eases stress and frustration, enabling us to more easily display a Christ-like demeanor. And given our limited budgets, finding the cheapest gas nearby is always a good thing. As a socially-connected navigation app, Waze also makes it easy to create a "group" – for example all the cars in a caravan headed to youth camp. All the members of the group can see where everyone else is, and you can easily push updates to other members of the group (e.g. "We're stopping at the QT in Harrisonville for gas and a quick break.").

Waze is also free (although it requires a smartphone and a cellu-

lar data plan – neither of which is free). In classic “disruptive innovation” fashion, Waze’s capabilities have blown past products from a few years ago costing hundreds or thousands of dollars.

The interesting twist to the “disruptive innovation” theme is the marriage of Google and Waze. Google already has a very popular and capable mapping application. Imagine Waze’s disruptive improvement trajectory with the starting point of Google’s already amazing map data. Imagine how quickly Waze’s value will build when all Google Maps users are feeding the Waze data engine? Navigation could become amazingly effective!

### What is dangerous about Waze?

Regular readers of my column can probably already guess most of what I will warn about when it comes to Waze. Waze is collecting your data all the time. I tend to believe they are only using it as an anonymous data store, but the fact that they do know each user means that someone else, with less honorable intentions, could potentially hack into their systems and use my data for other purposes. (I’m not going to get into NSA practices in this column, but it’s not hard to imagine less well-intentioned organizations using Waze data for less honorable purposes.)

The easiest way to start using Waze is to connect it to your Facebook account. When you do that, Waze defaults to letting your (Facebook) friends and their (Facebook) friends know when you’re driving nearby. You can change this setting (and I strongly recommend you do). In general, I think it’s a really bad idea to give a real time update to strangers saying that you aren’t home.

The biggest danger with Waze, however, is distracted driving. One of the “cool” features in Waze is the integration of “gamification.” You get points for doing things – like reporting traffic jams and gas prices. You graduate to new levels, and if you’re really active, you show up on the leaderboard. But all of those points-earning actions are distractions from what you really need to be doing – driving!

The Waze app also provides a lot more information than other navigation apps. As you drive, the screen becomes filled with icons, most of which are clickable for more information. You can also see icons of other Waze drivers around you (which means strangers are seeing your icon) and you can even click on the icon to send a private message

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to that other driver. Please don't be clicking and messaging people while driving down the highway – especially if it's a highway I'm driving on!

Bottom line – better navigation is a great thing, but don't be drawn into dangerous driving habits by the promise of better navigation. Arriving alive a few minutes later than optimal is better than not arriving at all. To the extent that our driving is done with young drivers and future drivers in our vehicle, we must be especially careful to demonstrate safe driving habits.

Finally, we must remember that, ultimately we must trust the Lord to guide our steps. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

It is my hope and prayer that these articles on the power and danger of technology will encourage you in your daily walk with Christ. Whether it is navigation apps, the printing press, radio, television, personal computers, the Internet, the Cloud, smartphones, or augmented reality, new technologies continue to advance our ability to know God and to serve Him, wherever we go.

*Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is CXfriends (<http://cxfriends.com>), a social network for Christian families which is being built and run by four homeschooled students under Russ' direction.*