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Daniel A. Begun
Technology journalist



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by Daniel A. Begun



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About the Author

Daniel A. Begun still doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up. But until he figures it out, he'll continue to have fun as a technology journalist, where he gets to play with lots of cool gadgets and apps.

In his 20 years of working in technology journalism, Daniel has written for numerous top technology publications and Web sites, including CNET, Computerworld, *Computer Shopper*, ExtremeTech, HotHardware.com, *Laptop* magazine, Maximum PC, and *PC Magazine*. Daniel is the former Labs Director for CNET, where he ran CNET's product testing labs for many years.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my amazing, supportive, understanding, patient wife, Caren; and to my beautiful, brilliant, funny, fiercely independent daughter, Sarah.

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Last, but not least, thank you, reader, for buying this book. I hope you find it useful.

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Introduction

Welcome to the very first *Amazing Android Apps For Dummies* book! I'd like to say this book has been a long time coming, but the truth of the matter is that Android apps have been around for only a couple of years, and they're only just now reaching the quality and quantity to justify such a book. If I had written this book even just a few months earlier, it would either have been a much thinner book, or I would have had to call it *Some Amazing but Mostly Mediocre Android Apps For Dummies*. That's too long a title, and it probably wouldn't make for a very interesting read.

By some accounts there were more than 150,000 apps available for Android devices by the end of 2010. That's a lot of apps, and the number of new apps that come available for Android devices keeps growing — by the end of 2010, roughly 1,000 new Android apps were showing up *every* day.

Some of the apps come from large companies that employ a phalanx of developers. Other apps are created by hobbyists and enthusiasts who are just getting their programming feet wet. But as I worked on this book and had occasion to reach out to the developer community time and time again, I discovered that many Android apps are produced by knowledgeable programmers, working in their spare time — mostly because they have a passion for the Android platform. For many developers, the potential money to be made from producing Android apps is a secondary concern, if at all.

There are actually far more free Android apps available than paid apps. And don't assume just because an app is free that it isn't any good. There are scads of *amazing* free Android apps to be found. And don't assume, either, that if you find a paid app that meets your needs or tickles your fancy that there must also be a free app that does the same thing and is just as good. That might be true in some cases, but many paid apps are well worth their price tags.

About This Book

Which brings me to the purpose of this book: to try to make some sense of all these Android apps! It's not humanly possible to systematically evaluate every single available Android app and decide if it's worthy of being installed on your device. I know this because I tried! The apps were coming out faster than I could install them, and I could only store so many apps on my Android devices before their

storage filled up. I can't keep track of the number of times my devices informed me that their storage were almost full and that I needed to remove some installed apps in order to make room for new apps.

So, yes, I looked at a lot of apps, but I didn't look at all 150,000+ of them. I probably evaluated somewhere in the neighborhood of 700 apps, which were on my radar because they had high Android Market ratings, positive user comments, they were recommended by friends and associates, I saw positive reviews on Web sites, or because I was already using them. (If you don't know what the Android Market is, take a look at my explanation of it in Chapter 1.) I didn't rely purely on this buzz to find worthy apps; I also scoured the Android Market on an almost daily basis looking at new arrivals as well.

I whittled the list down to 190 apps, with 10 apps in each category (chapter). For the most part, the apps fit well into their designated chapters, but several apps could easily fit into multiple chapters. For instance, should the Dolphin Browser HD (a Web browser app) go into the Communications, Productivity, Tools, or Utilities chapter?

I also need to mention that a few of the paid apps I evaluated were provided to me at no cost by their respective developers. But this was only *after* I had already identified the app as a strong candidate for the book — and some of these apps didn't make the cut.

There's also a whole other type of Android app called a widget, which is typically a window that sits on the Android home page that displays information. Many apps include widgets that provide a small subset of their features and act as shortcuts to launching the apps. There simply isn't room in this book to discuss widgets, so I focus purely on apps and their functionality as apps — even if they also include widgets. Perhaps my next project will be *Amazing Android Widgets For Dummies*.

Conventions Used in This Book

Throughout most of the book I use the term *Android device*. The vast majority of Android devices out there are mobile phones, but not all of them are. Another category of Android devices, the Android tablet, is quickly becoming very popular. There are even some portable media players and e-book readers that run the Android operating system. Android devices come in all shapes and sizes, and many of them are capable of running additional apps other than just the ones that they come with. So when you see the words *Android device* in this book,

know that I'm referring to virtually any device running the Android operating system that permits additional apps to be installed on it.

In fact, for this book I used no less than four different Android devices to evaluate the apps. Three of them were Android phones: a Samsung Epic 4G, HTC Incredible, and HTC Legend. But the fourth device was a 7-inch CherryPal CherryPad America (C515) tablet that doesn't have broadband Internet connectivity — just a Wi-Fi connection. For around the home or office (connected to a Wi-Fi router), the tablet worked fine with many of the apps, proving (at least to me) that Android is suited for far more than just mobile phones.

Many of the apps reviewed in this book are available from multiple sources and are just a Google search away. *All* of the apps reviewed are available from the Android Market, and I conveniently include a QR Code for each app next to the review that links directly to the app's entry in the Android Market.



A QR Code is a funky-looking, square bar code that has embedded information that a scanner can read and interpret. If your Android device has a built-in camera and an installed app that can read QR Codes, all you need to do is fire up the app and point your device's camera at the QR Code. After the QR Code is successfully read, the bar code scanner app converts the embedded information into text; then it should launch the corresponding app on your device — which, in the case of the QR codes in this book, is the Android Market app. (My favorite free bar code scanner app in the Android Market is the appropriately named Barcode Scanner.)

I also list the prices for each app (as of when the book was printed). Sometimes app prices go up and sometimes they go down. In fact, paid apps sometimes become free apps and vice versa. Developers from all over the globe make their apps available in the Android Market, which is why you see some apps listed in different currencies, such as the euro (€) or pound sterling (£). The Android Market automatically converts the price of the apps into your local currency so that you can quickly gauge how much an app will cost without having to figure out currency conversion rates. But because currency values fluctuate wildly, I list app prices in this book in their native currencies. (When you purchase an app from the Android Market, you go through a series of pages. The final page you see before you commit to the purchase always shows the app's price in its native currency.)

How This Book Is Organized

Pick a page, any page, any page at all. Really. You don't need to start at the beginning and work your way through, page-by-page, to the very end. Just go straight to the chapter or review of the specific app that you want to learn more about. Think of this book as a reference guide to Amazing Android apps. As to why it's organized the way it is, I had to put the chapters in *some* order, so alphabetically seemed the best way to go . . .

. . . Except for the first chapter, "Understanding Android." It is the only one that doesn't actually *review* any Android apps. Chapter 1 discusses exactly what Android is and some of the ins-and-outs about Android apps in general. The remaining 18 chapters are all app reviews of: Books; Communications; Education and Children's Apps; Entertainment; Finance; Games; Health, Food, and Fitness; Music; News and Weather; Photography and Video; Productivity and Business; Reference; Shopping and Dining Out; Social Networking; Sports; Tools; Travel and Navigation; and Utilities.

Each chapter includes reviews of five apps, listed alphabetically, with each review getting two pages of description and screenshots. Following these reviews are another five reviews — also in alphabetical order — with shorter descriptions. The apps within each chapter are not ranked in any way. The longer reviews do not necessarily mean that they are better apps than the apps in the shorter reviews — it's just that for some apps there's more to talk about.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book you see small icons located in the left margins. These icons are there to call your attention to an extra tidbit of information or offer some sage advice. Here are the icons you'll see in this book and what they mean:



These are suggestions, hints, and shortcuts that will help you wring even more usefulness out of the apps.



Sometimes it's good to know what's going on under the hood. While certainly not essential for using the apps, these extra morsels of information might give you a deeper appreciation for an app's inner workings — or at least perhaps impress your friends at your next dinner party with your newfound wisdom.



If everything worked exactly the way we expect it to, we wouldn't need *For Dummies* books, right? Pay attention when you see this icon, because I'm trying to save you from making a potential mistake that could cost you time, money, or embarrassment — or perhaps all three.

Where to Go from Here

Isn't it obvious? Fire up your Android device, launch the Android Market app, and start installing some apps!

1 Understanding Android

In mobile device terms, the word *Android* can refer to either an Android device or to the Android operating system. In very simple terms, an Android device is any device that runs the Android operating system. You might also encounter androids from science fiction films and books, which are robots that resemble people, but that's not the type of Android I discuss in this book.

You don't need to understand what Android is or how it works to use it. You can simply turn your device on and start pressing buttons and tapping icons and you'll probably get along just fine. That approach worked just fine for my 3-year-old daughter; she figured it out pretty quickly, much to my dismay. But in case you want a small peek behind the Android curtain, this chapter is for you . . .

Introducing the Android Operating System

Android is the operating system that powers all Android devices. Much like how the Windows operating system powers laptop and desktop computers, or Apple's iOS (formerly known as the iPhone OS) powers iPhones and iPads. Think of it as the underlying software that instructs your device what to do. When you install an Android app onto an Android device, you are installing an app that was written specifically for the Android operating system. You can't install a Windows app on an Android device, and you can't install an Android app onto a Windows computer.



Actually, that last part isn't exactly true. You actually *can* install Android apps onto a Windows computer — and even on Macs and Linux PCs, for that matter — but only if the computer is running a special piece of software called an *Android emulator*, which creates a virtual Android device on your computer. Developers frequently use such emulators to test their apps.

Speaking of Linux, the Android operating system is actually an offshoot of the Linux operating system. Since its inception, however, Android has developed into a robust, independent operating system designed for mobile devices, and it's not actually directly compatible with Linux.

Android is an *open source* operating system, which means that a large community of companies and developers maintain it and contribute toward developing newer versions of it. This all takes place under the auspices of Google, which bought the company (Android, Inc.) that