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Hardware, Software & Technology



Taking Social Networking to the Streets

October 19, 2010

BUMP.com, a new mobile and Web-based communications and messaging service, offers a unique twist—a technology that allows users to safely message other motorists based on their license plate numbers.

BUMP.com includes speak-and-listen technology that lets users avoid texting and reading when mobile. Voice, email, photo and SMS messages are delivered via BUMP's integrated Web and mobile platform, which includes voice recognition and optical interfaces, allowing users to either snap a photo of the license plate the vehicle they wish to contact or to verbally input the license plate number on their mobile phone. Text messaging is disabled while the user's vehicle is in motion.

Motorists must opt into the system by "claiming their plate" on the BUMP.com website, which lets them control how they want to send or receive "BUMPs," who can contact them, what type of messages they will accept and even what type of emergency notifications they wish to receive. Users can also determine if they want BUMP.com to connect with other social applications, such as Facebook or Twitter. The system allows users to connect directly to the mobile phones of registered, participating BUMP.com members. "It's a sort of CB radio, but for the entire world," says Mitch Thrower, founder and CEO of La Jolla, Calif.-based BUMP.com.

BUMP.com's privacy settings also allow members to choose the type of information they wish to receive about products and special offers, based on their own likes, dislikes and travel or purchasing habits. BUMP.com turns the license plate number of every car on the road into a "real world cookie," Thrower says. Messages, discount offers and other information sent to any license plate are stored in the BUMP.com system until the plate owner "claims" his or her plate number and begins using the system. BUMP.com says it's working with fast-food outlets, professional sports leagues, rental car companies and other organizations to add BUMP.com to their marketing efforts.

A survey commissioned by BUMP.com indicates that more than a third of respondents, both men and women, are interested in networking with people in other cars. More than two-thirds of respondents said they would use the service for safety on the road. "The fusion of the existing vehicle registration network and BUMP.com's technology creates a completely new way of communicating with other people and a new form of what I am calling 'motion demographics' for businesses," Thrower says.

The current BUMP.com beta version allows users to register their plates and begin sending and receiving messages through a computer or mobile phone. Apps specifically designed for iPhone, Blackberry and Android phones will be available soon, the company says.

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