

# App matches complete strangers

Link transmits data, but keeps anonymity



Photo by: Patrick Whittemore

1

EMPATHY PLAY: Tinsley Galyean, left, and Taylor Levy display the 20 Day Stranger application on a cell phone inside The Media lab at MIT, where Kevin Slavin, the lab's Playful Systems group director, helped out.

Sunday, May 4, 2014

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Be the first to comment](#)

By: **Jordan Graham**

For 20 days, when you wake up, go to sleep, and everywhere you go will be sent to a complete stranger, automatically.

You haven't been hacked, and it's not Facebook's newest, privacy-blurring feature. It's 20 Day Stranger, an app designed by a group of Massachusetts Institute of Technology students and faculty to increase compassion and understanding between strangers who have never met, and never will.

"This is about finding a way of opening a window," said Kevin Slavin, director of the MIT Media Lab's Playful Systems group. "The idea isn't to make your life transparent, it's to give just enough to wonder and imagine and ultimately, to care."

The app, still in development, matches two complete strangers and then gives a running feed of vague descriptions of where the person is, including "near an airport," or "at a cafe."

"We can start to develop this sense of intimate moments with somebody we don't know and will never know," said Tinsley Galyean, co-director of MIT's Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values. "Sometimes it's very mundane, but sometimes they're in the hospital."

The information is intentionally vague, not only for privacy reasons, but also as part of the user experience.

Development of the app began after Galyean asked Slavin and his Media Lab group to try to create software that could produce a sense of understanding and empathy for strangers.

"From a design perspective, it's a really big challenge to make something that has a call to build (something that makes people surround themselves around compassion," said Taylor Levy, a masters student at MIT.

20 Day Stranger is just one of a growing number of apps that rely on anonymity. Apps such as Secret and Whisper, with which users post anonymous notes that can be seen by their phone contacts, do not bring out the best in people, Slavin said.

The app does not collect any information, instead acting as a link between the two strangers. Tapping into services such as FourSquare, Instagram and Google Maps, 20 Day Stranger sends photos that have been taken where the stranger is, but without any geographical or identifying information. A user would have to recognize a photo to figure out where their stranger is in the world.

"It is explicitly about producing imagination and conjecture, not transmitting information," Slavin said. "What we're interested in is the passive qualities of living your everyday life."

More On: [20 Day Stranger](#) [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) [Kevin Slavin](#) [MIT Media Lab](#)

Author(s):

Jordan Graham / Boston Herald  
[@jordanmgraham](#)

[Print This Page](#)

[Email This Page](#)



## Newsmax

- [Russia Bans US From Space Station](#)
- [Miranda Kerr Sparks Billionaire Street Brawl](#)
- [Casey Kasem Mystery: Radio Star Missing](#)
- [Gingrich Raps Rove for Hillary Tactic](#)
- [Explorer Claims to Find Columbus' Lost Ship](#)
- [New Testosterone Booster Takes GNC by Storm](#)
- [The Discouraging Truth About Protein Powders](#)
- [Assess Your Heart Attack Risk in Minutes. Click Here.](#)

[What's This?](#)

44

Share

16

Tweet

20

+1

submit

reddit

Share



FROM AROUND THE WEB

- U.S. Cellular Announces New 4G LTE Router as a Small Business Solution (SlashGear)
- Where Boston's Politicos Drink and Dine (Zagat)
- What are the Cons of a Reverse Mortgage? (Liberty Reverse Mortgage)
- Snowden doc shows Microsoft colluded with FBI to break Outlook encryption (DailyDot)
- Best 6 Credit Cards with No Interest to Help You Get out of Debt (NextAdvisor Daily)
- Hot Pictures of Former Collegiate Pole Vaulter Allison Stokke (Rant Sports)

MORE FROM BOSTONHERALD.COM

- WW II fighter ace from Massachusetts dies
- Explorer: Shipwreck off Haiti may be Santa Maria
- Parachutists: We spent 4 hours atop trade center
- Man who killed wife in 2011 sentenced to 50 years
- Charge: Alaska man, 19, shot troopers from behind
- Ex-Lawrence officer dies without repaying money

Recommended by

Join The Conversation

View Comments (Be the first to comment) | Add a Comment

ADVERTISEMENT

Online Content Now on TV

google.com/Chromecast

Stream video and music on your TV wirelessly! Buy now for only \$35.



LET US STAY WITH YOU. SM

COMFORT YOU INCLUDES BREAKFAST FOR TWO AND \$100 RESORT CREDIT

DISCOVER MORE

SAN JUAN



THE RITZ-CARLTON®

News & Opinion

- Local Coverage
- Local Politics
- Columnists
- Opinion
- National
- U.S. Politics
- International
- Offbeat News
- Obituaries

Sports

- Red Sox & MLB
- Patriots & NFL
- Celtics & NBA
- Bruins & NHL
- College
- Revolution & Soccer
- Golf
- Columnists
- High School

Entertainment

- Arts & Culture
- Movies
- Music
- Food & Dining
- Health & Fitness
- Travel
- Lifestyle
- Style & Fashion
- Books
- Television

The Inside Track

- Celebrity News

Business

- Real Estate
- Media & Marketing
- Automotive
- Business & Markets

About The Herald

- Send a News Tip
- Contact Us
- Google+
- Twitter
- Facebook

Classifieds

- Boston Business Directory
- Carfind
- Homefind
- Jobfind

Extras

- Home Delivery
- Horoscope
- Lottery
- Contest Corner
- Crossword
- Weather
- Log In

Advertise With Us | Purchase Back Copies | Send a News Tip | Contact Us | Home Delivery | Electronic Edition | Mobile and Apps | Herald Newsletters

Save on Boston Herald Home Delivery

For back copy and collectible issue information please call 617-619-6265. Click here for Celtics, Patriots and Red Sox, and Bruins back copies

© Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Media.

No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. Privacy Commitment