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Trends in mobile and wireless technology.

“Using Mobile Technology to Prevent Texting while Driving”

For Wednesday, January 27, 2010

Note: I have transitioned out of my full-time role at Frost & Sullivan so that I can spend more time on my venture advisory services provided through Yosemite Ventures and build my analyst practice under MobileTrax, a brand I used for 10+ years before joining Frost & Sullivan in 2006. I will continue to write & distribute Inside Mobile & Wireless under MobileTrax.

You’ve undoubtedly seen a news segment on TV or in the press recently about the dangers of texting while driving. I can tell you that I’ve stopped doing it. My current rule: only text when I’m stopped at a traffic light or when not in a car. I feel I’m protecting myself and those around me by simply putting the phone down when the car’s moving.

Many states have already enacted [legislation](#) outlawing the behavior of texting while driving. These laws send an important message to everyone: it’s against the law to text while driving. Also, take a look at the recent ad by State Farm Insurance included here (right). State Farm supports the growing number of state that are passing laws outlawing texting while driving.

I agree that these laws should be enacted. After all, its common sense that texting is a major distraction while driving. Recently, I was driving southbound on GA 400 just north of I-285 in Atlanta. A woman was going close to 80 mph in the left lane came past me. I looked over and was aghast: she had her elbows on the



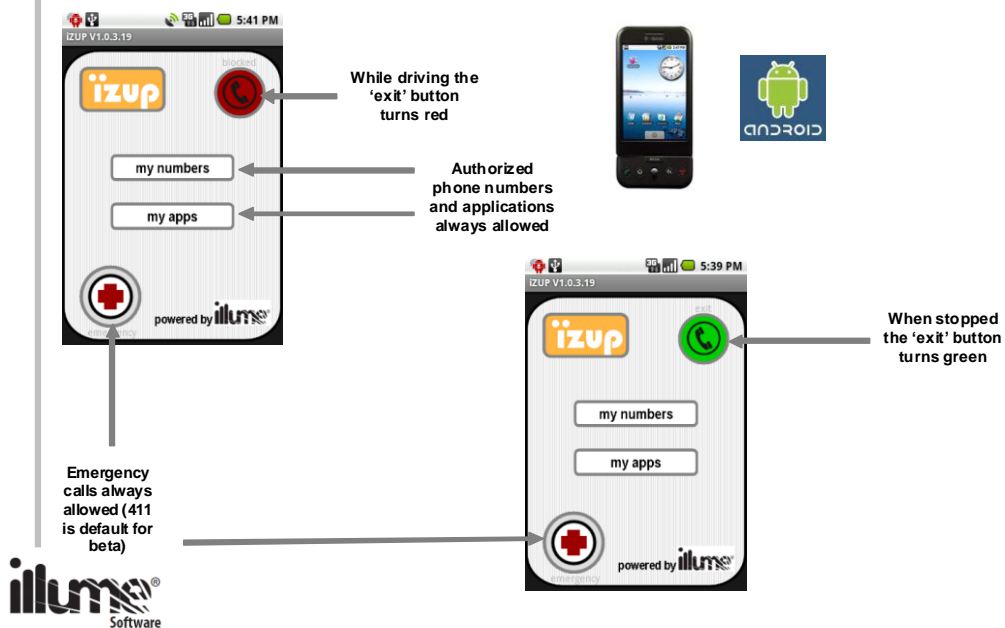
steering wheel and was holding a BlackBerry up in her hands above the steering wheel and was texting away. I quickly moved over a lane to avoid being close to someone who was being so reckless. But, we're going to create a new problem in the process of enacting these 'no texting while driving' laws. Here's why.

There's a big problem with these 'don't text while driving' laws: they are hard to enforce. How do you know if someone is texting while driving if they are holding the phone in their lap or texting with the phone on the seat or mid-section between the front seats? And, what if you have a medical emergency and need to call for help? It's easy to see there is going to be a lot of confusion on how to enforce the new laws. And, we'll have to develop a whole new set of case law around this topic. Prosecutors and defense lawyers will have to deal with entirely new area of law. I can hear it now: "My client wasn't texting. She was simply listening to music on her phone."

I believe that we need to use mobile technologies to help solve this problem along with a good dose of education & behavior modification to create a safer environment for everyone in and around a car that's moving at high speed on a highway (or any road for that matter).

A number of companies have announced various solutions that use mobile technology to prevent texting while driving. These include [Illume Software](#) (izup), [ZoomSafer](#), [txtBlocker](#), [Aegis Mobility](#) (DriveAssist for Teens), [DriveSafe.ly](#) (from iSpeech), [Tomahawk Systems](#) and [odbEdge](#) (CellControl) are all developing systems that work in various ways to prevent texting while driving.

iZUP: Screenshots (G1 & myTouch)



Illume Software's iZup solution uses GPS to detect if you're driving on a highway. It runs in the background and comes to life when it detects you are moving faster than a preset velocity, typically 5 mph. Once it detects that the phone is moving more than the preset value, it interrupts the normal operation of the phone with the iZup application. Subscribers cannot text or make phone calls while the car is moving. See the diagram. iZup uses mapping information as well as GPS so it can detect if the car is on a highway or, instead, on a train or mass transit.

The izup web interface provides the account holder/parent/fleet manager the ability to enter "white list" numbers (e.g. home, mom, dad). If/when 911 is dialed, izup shuts down the app to allow emergency calls, and the system sends a notification to the parent/account holder/fleet manager that 911 was dialed and provides them with the exact location including a map of where the emergency occurred. Parents will love that feature.

Illume Software's izup is a client centric solution while Aegis Mobility DriveAssist is a network centric solution that also detects when the car is moving and re-directs all phone communications to a message center that explains that the caller is unavailable because they are driving. It also defers text messages. TxtBlocker works similarly to Illume Software's izup.

Both ZoomSafer & DriveSafe.ly focus on using text to speech to read text messages to you while you're driving while Safe Driving Systems (Key2SafeDriving) & obdEdge

(CellControl) use a hardware dongle in the car that communicates with the user's cell phone via Bluetooth. When the phone gets within range of the dongle in the car, key2SafeDriving turns off the use of the phone and texting.

This is an early market. There are not a lot of customers using these systems. The initial focus is to prevent teens from texting while driving but, eventually, enterprises are going to demand some control over the use of their corporate asset (the phone) to help reduce their liability of the phone being part of or the cause of an accident by an employee. I'm sure that eventually mobile software and hardware to assist in driving safely will become an active part of every vehicle (from small cars to large trucks).

I close by raising a bigger problem than texting while driving: how much distraction is acceptable while driving? Or, perhaps more important, how do we keep drivers focused on their own driving and of cars and trucks around them to keep the vehicle and passengers as safe as possible?

Mobile technology will provide a major contribution to making driving safer, but drivers still are still in final control of a large, fast moving vehicle. It's what the driver does (or doesn't do) that determines the final outcome.

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Disclosure Statement: From time to time, I may have a direct or indirect equity position in a company that is mentioned in this column. If that situation happens, then I'll disclose it at that time.