

Function vs. Security/Privacy Tradeoff

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It is important to always remember that "Life is a tradeoff." Every gadget that gives you benefits does so at a cost which may or may not be apparent or significant to the user. You want to track your cellphone, your keys or your wallet? You can, gadgets that keep in touch with your smartphone are often referred to as tags. These devices are currently available, or will soon be available, for everything we all lose or spent lots of time locating (i.e. glasses, briefcase and purse). These tags are relatively inexpensive and run on batteries or rechargeable batteries to power a Bluetooth, Wi-Fi or other transmission signal. Most are very small in size, use low power and are designed to hone in on the location of an item. Some are designed to maintain a constant location status, enabling the user to identify the last known location of their tagged belonging. Other tags are designed for both locating on the fly and for keeping a constant location status of the item tagged.

The location services setting must be enabled for each app that tracks a device, or which tracks your smart phone's location on a map. This same location tracking is used by mapping software, fitness trackers, AroundMe apps that can find the nearest coffee shop, gas station or any other specific vendor or general class of vendors. In addition to offering the desired assistance these apps can also invade the users privacy while constantly draining your smart phone battery.

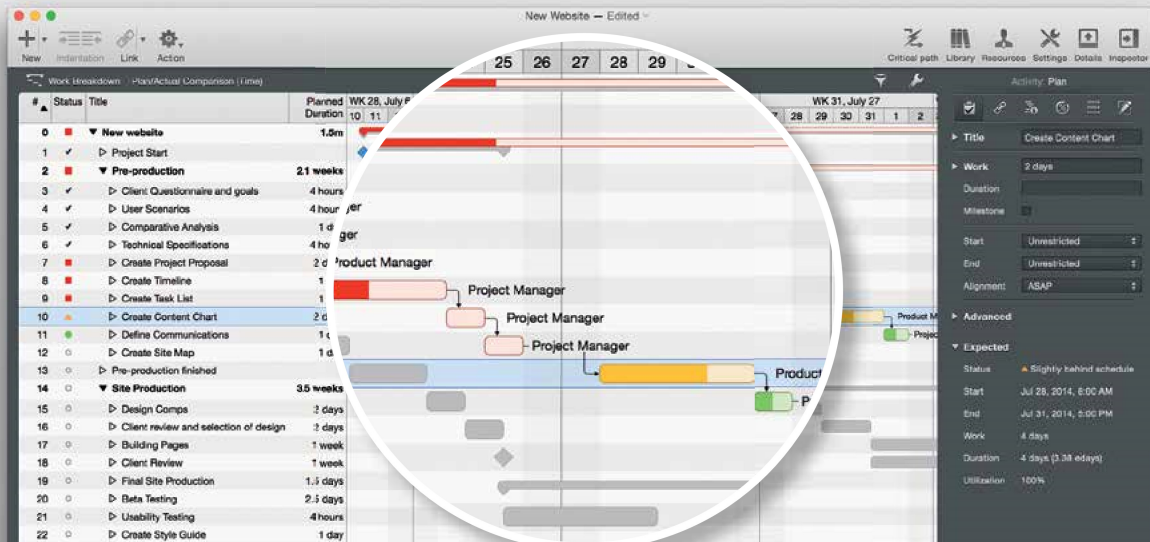
Is the tradeoff of smartphone battery life drain and potential loss of personal privacy worth the benefit of finding your belonging? This is clearly a very individual decision. For me, it's not worth the privacy invasion or the battery drain. I do use the location tracking feature in a limited fashion though. Many of the apps let you choose to enable location tracking either always or

never. Some apps give a third option of while using the app. The while using the app setting is a far less invasive option which is why I use this setting for my Uber and Lyft cab service apps. For the apps that give only two options I leave it on never and if I am going on a bike ride, for example, I set it to always in the Runtastic sports tracking app until my ride is complete. For apps that track tags I do not get full advantage for the functionality of the app because I set location tracking on never. However, I am still able to use these apps to find my keys by using my smartphone like a Giger counter with the radioactive device being my keys. My limited use of the tags tracking apps does not let me look up the last known location of my keys, but it also does not track my every movement.

Do you find your smart phone running out of battery before your day is over? Do you mind if an unknown app developer can pinpoint your whereabouts anytime your smartphone is in your possession and powered on? Do you mind if an unknown app developer can maintain a log of where you have been through the use of location services? This data could be very valuable to marketers of all sorts, enough so that an app developer might give away their app for free, or at very low cost, just to sell the data they collect. Remember free is never free, app developers need to have a way to monetize their efforts.

Read the EULA (End User Licensing Agreement). It will likely give you, in difficult to understand legalese, what you have agreed to give up in exchange for using the app. If you can't understand the EULA, you might try googling the name of the app and read the feedback of their community of users. Often, if there are privacy issues, some reviewer or blogger will write about it.

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