

The Survival Smartphone (or Gadget)

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These days everyone seems to have a smartphone or other electronic gadget. Unfortunately, most people I know use them primarily to take selfies and surf the web for funny pictures and videos. Occasionally they even use them to make phone calls or to do work! What many people don't realize however is that these gadgets can be a valuable part of their preparation and survival plans.

The survival gadget technically could include any mobile device that can run apps and has storage space, but for the sake of practicality I recommend limiting it to pocket-sized devices. In an emergency scenario where you may be working in extreme conditions, a laptop or tablet is simply too bulky and too likely to get broken. You will want something compact, tough, and capable of one-handed operation. My go-to survival gadget is an old iPod Touch with 32GB of storage, which I carry in a belt pouch everywhere I go. It lacks GPS and a bright flashlight, but serves admirably for my purposes. Because of my personal device, the examples provided below lean to iOS, but Android and Windows devices offer similar utility and applications.

The most important consideration for a survival gadget is power. No amount of useful information will help if the gadget cannot be used because of a dead battery. You need to either have a fully-charged spare battery or (preferably) a way to charge the device, or both. Possible solutions include solar chargers, cigarette lighter adaptors, inverters with USB outlets, and hand-crank weather radios with adaptor plugs. For those surviving in the wilderness, Biolite Stoves even sells a woodburning camp stove that uses heat to generate electricity to a USB outlet! This multipurpose unit provides for cooking without the need to carry fuel, *and* the ability to charge devices. Ideally one should employ multiple charging methods for maximum options in an emergency. I have hand-crank radios at home and in the office, and carry both a cigarette lighter charger and a small inverter in my car. I also carry a charging cable with me at all times and have a small solar charger on my go-bag. A Biolite stove is on my wish list, as I require a reliable way to keep my device functioning while on prolonged search and rescue missions away from my vehicle in adverse conditions.

A large amount of memory is highly desirable in a survival gadget. If your goal is to store a mountain of information and apps as well as all the standard pictures, music, and day-to-day electronic fluff, you will want to ensure that you never have to worry about running out of storage space at a critical time. If you are using a phone with a low amount of memory make sure it can use an expansion memory card. If you opt for a device with no memory card capability, be sure that the built-in memory is up to the task. My iPod currently contains 1,342 songs, 25 (short) videos, 1,316 photos, 314 apps, over 60 complete books (many of them several hundred pages in length), and quite a few miscellaneous PDF files, yet still has 6.9GB free! That, in a slim pocket-sized package, is truly mind-boggling. While allowing room for common daily stuff, this amount of memory makes a device

capable of holding the vital data necessary for a survival gadget.

There are a plethora of great apps for emergency/survival situations. Sad to say though, many of them would be of limited use in the wilderness or in a grid-down scenario. Do *not* rely on any app that requires cell service or wi-fi for core functionality. That survival reference app that seems so amazing at the office may be completely useless when you are lost and injured in the mountains with no cell service! In my area, cell service is spotty at best as soon as one leaves town, and frequently disappears completely the moment there is any major problem. Even in areas with good service it *cannot* be relied upon in an emergency. Take the time to check now to make sure your apps can function independent of an internet connection. That said, look for practical references in a wide variety of fields. Recommended subjects include first aid, topographical maps, knot tying and other survival skills, and hazmat. You may want others, depending on your areas of expertise. Plenty of these high-quality apps are available completely free, so everyone should have at least a few of them on their devices. Many more-sophisticated (and ad-free) apps cost between one and twenty dollars. Search your app store of choice frequently for the best available options for your needs, and don't hesitate to upgrade when something better comes along or install several similar apps at once. As long as you have the room on your device it is better to have too many choices than to lack the one you actually need in an emergency.

The one role of the survival gadget that people most often overlook is that of a portable electronic library and archiving system. Sure apps are sexy and fun to show off, but sometimes all you need is file storage. As noted, today's electronic devices are capable of holding huge amounts of data. Compared to apps, music, and videos which can be quite large, simple files such as text, PDF, or low-resolution images take a minimal amount of space. Because of this, the survival gadget is ideally suited to storing manuals and reference material, as well as backup files and personal records. Be aware that while cloud services such as Dropbox or Google Drive are a convenient way to supplement your storage space and sync files between multiple devices, those files will likely not reside on your mobile device, and will thus be unavailable without an internet connection! This may vary by cloud service and platform, so check in advance. Your best option is to use apps such as iBooks or Adobe Reader (or Android or Windows counterparts) that let you store and access files directly on your device, with no need for an internet connection to view the files.

Most instruction manuals for any kind of mechanical or electronic device are now available as PDF downloads, or come on a disc from the factory, so they are easily transferred to your gadget. In an emergency, having immediate access to a manual without the need to lug around paper books could make all the difference. Store manuals for radios, generators, car repair, weapons, or anything else you might want. Also be sure to include electronic copies of all your emergency plans, including personal and business. Make it a point to acquire PDF versions of reference books of all kinds,

especially survival and homesteading skills. In a prolonged grid-down scenario everyday life can quickly come to resemble that of the 1800s. Imagine the utility of an entire book that explains step-by-step how to do the basic skills that were taken for granted then, but which have disappeared from our technological lives today. Even better, you can carry all that combined knowledge with you in your pocket!

The survival gadget can store backups of your critical files and papers too. Do you have a spreadsheet that you absolutely need to keep intact? As well as off-site copies, keep a copy on your device. How about a will or other legal documents? There's room for them too. Paper documents can simply be scanned and saved as PDF files to transfer to the device, or you can snap photos of them with your device. Likewise, you may want to take pictures of your belongings in case an inventory is needed for any insurance claims. Keep them with all your other files on the device. And, when the disaster has passed, use that same device to snap pictures or take video to document the damage!

Finally, the built-in apps on gadgets provide help for simple tasks. Use it to take notes, either by typing or as a digital recorder. This is a nice feature on SAR missions or in an emergency when you may not have pen and paper handy. Take advantage of GPS (if available) to navigate in unfamiliar or unrecognizable regions, and track your progress to aid in rescue efforts. Turn to it for an emergency flashlight, a pocket alarm clock, and a versatile scientific calculator. The list goes on, depending upon the requirements of the individual user.

I hope this information encourages you to look at your handheld gadget in a new way. Not just a telephone or a casual plaything, it is a powerful tool for emergency preparedness and response. Use the device to its full potential; load it up with useful apps and files, and learn how to put it to work while offline. Properly deployed, the survival gadget deserves a place in every prepared person's go-bag, right next to the multi-tool and paracord. Add it to yours today!

Below are links and lists of items that you may find useful or interesting. These are suggestions, not an endorsement of any particular product. All of the apps listed are free and are installed on my iPod, but there are many other excellent free or paid choices too. I have two of the Ambient Weather radios and a Levin solar charger, and can attest that they work well and are a good value. All other items listed under Power are simply devices that I have viewed or read about on the internet, and I cannot vouch for the quality or value of any of them. Again, I encourage readers to research options and make use of what meets their own requirements.

Resources.

- Power
 - <http://biolitestove.com/products/campstove/>

- http://www.amazon.com/Levin-trade-Rain-resistant-Shockproof-Portable/dp/B00JEGLLI6/ref=pd_sim_cps_2?ie=UTF8&refRID=04F1AX6PX0GR3MQ43T78
- http://www.amazon.com/Ambient-Weather-WR-111-B-AC-Emergency-Flashlight/dp/B00B9HRJI4/ref=sr_1_3?s=electronics&ie=UTF8&qid=1403507900&sr=1-3&keywords=weather+radio
- <http://securproducts.com/index/>
- <http://www.energizerpower.com/inverters/EN120.php>
- Apps
 - What Knot to Do (Columbia Sportswear)
 - You Need a Map! (GrangerFX) – Note: **2GB** download!
 - Survival Guide (Max Soderstrom)
 - ERG 2012 (USDOT)
 - WISER (National Library of Medicine)
 - First Aid (Red Cross)
 - iBooks (Apple)
 - Adobe Reader (Adobe)
 - Documents (Savy Soda)
 - Best Flash Light! (RV AppStudios)
- Reference/how-to books (generally PDFs)
 - family/business disaster plans
 - manuals for any complex equipment (radio, generator, firearms, etc.)
 - automotive repair manuals
 - illustrated field first aid references
 - military/civilian wilderness survival manuals (fire, water, shelter, etc.)
 - construction/remodeling how-tos
 - homesteading skills (gardening, canning, firewood, hand-power, etc.)
 - FEMA/DHS texts (NIMS, ICS, NRF, CERT, etc.)
- Backups
 - photos of stuff (for insurance)
 - list of important passwords
 - scanned documents (birth certificate, driver license, passport, etc.)
 - personal or business financial information
 - important project files
 - warranty information