How WhatsApp became our favourite way to chat

If you don’t already use WhatsApp, you probably soon will. A few months ago, WhatsApp went past its billionth user, and it will get bigger.

Last year, it sent more messages than traditional SMS text messages. Since 2010, it has been possible to make voice calls from WhatsApp. Messages are sent over the internet and it is more efficient and easy to use than other apps. You can message one-on-one, or set up a group in your phone contacts list – family, say, or friends.

WhatsApp can be an important tool for people. Members of the British Medical Association’s junior doctors’ committee used WhatsApp to talk about strike action. Before the EU referendum, the remain campaign was accused of using secret WhatsApp groups to discuss tactics, away from official methods. In 2014, the BBC launched a public health information service during the Ebola crisis for users in West Africa, which eventually reached 25,000 people on WhatsApp.

The history of WhatsApp is one of the most interesting in the technology sector.

WhatsApp founder Koum and his mother moved to the US from Ukraine when he was 16, to run away from antisemitism and unrest. They were very poor. When Koum sold the company to Facebook for $19bn, he signed the deal in the offices where his mother had collected her food stamps.

He started WhatsApp in 2009. Koum had a simple idea: an app that allows you to set your status on your phone to show if you are available.
At the time, the only other messaging services were BlackBerry Messenger and Apple’s iMessage. However, these services only worked on their own phones.

Today WhatsApp is the biggest app. In 2017 WhatsApp will have 1.6 billion users, sending 1.5tn messages a month.

However, not everyone is happy. In April, WhatsApp announced it was to use end-to-end encryption across its service. This means that a message can only be read by its recipient – not by the authorities, and not even by the company itself.

President Barack Obama is not happy about encryption: “If it is possible to make an impenetrable device or system, how do we apprehend the child pornographer? How do we disrupt a terrorist plot?” In May, a judge in Brazil ordered authorities to block WhatsApp because the company did not share information on a drugs cartel (a higher court later changed this decision). In the UK, the government has regularly said that it wanted to ban end-to-end encryption.

Another problem is group chats that generate a lot anxiety for some people. In group chats you can send messages to more than one person at a time. “Groups stress me out, with the constant notifications,” says Kelechi Okafor, a fitness trainer who has used WhatsApp for about five years. “I know you can switch the notifications off, but I tend to not have groups unless I really need them.”

For most people the biggest problem may be this: the app’s two blue ticks that tell you if your message has been read. And you haven't received a reply. Is it worse to know you're being ignored, or to know you can never ignore other people in the same way again?

(Adapted from The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jul/03/from-political-coups-to-family-feuds-how-whatsapp-became-our-favourite-way-to-chat)

Comparatives. Correggi le seguenti frasi tratte dall'articolo. Poi rileggi per verificare le tue risposte.

a. Last year, it sent more messages of traditional SMS text messages.

b. The story of WhatsApp is one of the more interesting in the technology sector.

c. Today WhatsApp is the most big app.

d. They were very poor.

e. It is more efficient and easy to use than other apps.

f. In group chats you can send messages to most than one person at a time.