What is Telegram?

Telegram is a multi-platform messaging service founded by Russian entrepreneur Pavel Durov. It rolled out for Android in Alpha on October 20, 2013, and now has an estimated [200 million monthly users](https://www.statista.com/statistics/258749/most-popular-global-mobile-messenger-apps/).

Telegram’s user base tends to increase whenever a privacy scandal hits [one of its larger competitors](https://www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/facebook-explains-its-worst-outage-as-3-million-users-head-to-telegram/).

Telegram Messenger: Just another messaging app?

Telegram’s core functionality is the same as most other messaging apps: You can message other Telegram users, create group conversations, call contacts, and send files and stickers.

Telegram’s similarity to other more popular messaging apps is a major part of why some people either haven’t heard of it or aren’t interested in using it — If they already use a messaging app and it serves them well, why would they consider another?

Telegram’s headline feature is privacy, and to ensure this it employs end-to-end encryption. This is what stops those outside a two-way conversation — be it a company, the government, hackers, or someone else — from seeing what has been sent.

For the average person, using Telegram doesn't necessarily mean their messages are more private or secure than when using WhatsApp.

However, Telegram only uses this encryption [in calls](https://telegram.org/blog/calls) and in its “secret chats” feature (which I talk more about below), not in regular chats — those are only encrypted client to server. Meanwhile, WhatsApp, the [supposedly](https://telegram.org/faq#q-how-is-telegram-different-from-whatsapp) less secure service, has used end-to-end encryption in messages, calls, and video calls [since 2016](https://www.androidauthority.com/whatsapp-encryption-684188/). Both services also have optional two-factor authentication.

So, for the average person, using Telegram doesn’t **necessarily** mean their messages are more private or secure than when using WhatsApp. In fact, unless they’re using secret chats, WhatsApp’s messaging is technically the more secure.

With that being said, there is an aspect of Telegram that means your privacy is unlikely to be abused, and it relates to its broader business model.

Monetization

News stories like Facebook’s [Cambridge Analytica](https://www.androidauthority.com/87m-facebook-users-affected-by-cambridge-analytica-852370/) scandal, apps sending data to Facebook [without user consent](https://www.androidauthority.com/yelp-duolingo-facebook-privacy-963068/), and Amazon employees [listening to what you ask Alexa](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-10/is-anyone-listening-to-you-on-alexa-a-global-team-reviews-audio), have all raised concerns about how our data is monitored and distributed. If you want to use a multi-billion dollar company’s service, it can be difficult to avoid.

EDITOR'S PICK

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According to Telegram’s [FAQ page](https://telegram.org/faq), the company is funded by its founder and CEO Pavel Durov, not through advertising or data collection and sharing. On the same page, Telegram also lists one of its two tenets of internet privacy as “protecting your personal data from third parties, such as marketers, advertisers, etc.”

In other words, while big companies like Facebook, Amazon, Google, and others may all have good intentions with regards to encryption, authentication, and privacy, they all integrate with advertisers and data sharing in ways Telegram, by design, does not.

What are the pros of Telegram?

Telegram’s main feature list may cross over with other apps, but there are many specific differences between it and its competitors. Here are some of the bigger differences.

**Secret chats**

The aforementioned secret chats are where you can take part in end-to-end encrypted messaging with a contact. But that’s not its only benefit: Secret chats also doesn’t allow a person forward messages from there or take screenshots. Of course, someone could take a picture of the screen with another device, but it’s still discouraged, and it’s bolstered by another feature: self-destruct timers.

**Self-destruct timers**

If you don’t want messages in your secret chats to hang around forever, Telegram lets you set self-destruct timers to permanently remove them. After a message is received, it remains in the chat for a predetermined period — you can choose times between one second and one week – before disappearing.

If you want to send big files, Telegram has much of the competition beat.

You’ll have to be especially concerned with privacy to want to do this — it means you’ll never have a chat log — nonetheless, it’s a nice option that Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and WeChat don’t have.

**Global message deletion**

As of [last month](https://www.androidauthority.com/telegram-update-version-5-5-968660/), Telegram allows users to delete messages sent by other users. It’s a somewhat [divisive feature](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.telegram.messenger&hl=en&reviewId=gp%3AAOqpTOEMZjCIfPWK0iOZJja5IHmLY33FMoWCFSSnd2qPLxCw6nB2If6wg2s-zOu1I-QO9HMSnb_aAKlBDFp4ut8). Having your messages deleted by someone else probably doesn’t feel very good. But if your conversation is between you and a person you trust, it’s another handy way to control your online communications.

**Large file size limit**

If you want to send big files, Telegram has much of the competition beat with support for up to 1.5GB files. Meanwhile, [WhatsApp’s limit is 100MB](https://faq.whatsapp.com/en/iphone/20964587), [WeChat’s limit is 100MB](https://blog.wechat.com/2018/01/31/whats-new-in-wechat-6-6-2-for-ios/), and [Skype’s limit is also 100MB](https://www.ghacks.net/2016/05/22/skype-file-transfers-limited-100mb/).

**Customizations**

Telegram comes with some customization options absent from many of its competitors where you can choose the dominant app color, how Telegram opens links, whether or not the UI shows animations, and more. Telegram also features a chatbot integration where you can make use of and even create chatbots to improve the experience; here’s a list of [some of the best ones](https://medium.com/invitemember/7-bots-every-telegram-channel-owner-should-know-about-20001668dfdb).

What are the cons of Telegram?

**Video calling**

You can’t make video calls on Telegram messenger, which many competing messaging services support. Naturally, it also can’t group video calls like WhatsApp, [Skype](https://www.androidauthority.com/solve-skype-problems-on-android-871059/), and Facebook Messenger can. Your mileage will vary on how important this feature is.

**5 free text apps for Android that send real SMS messages!**

**Offline status functionality**

Telegram can let users “appear offline,” but the functionality is problematic. Telegram displays an estimation of when a user last accessed the app, so others can see if you’ve been on it recently or within the last month. In an app so concerned with privacy, hiding your online status completely should be a possibility.

**New user announcement**

A further privacy blunder is that Telegram notifies your contacts when you join it — unless they have previously opted out. The app doesn’t warn you it’s about to ping your contacts (if there’s a way to avoid this I’m yet to discover it) and that’s a big caveat for those who want to use Telegram to keep a low-profile.

Popularity breeds popularity: trying to dethrone WhatsApp is an uphill battle for Telegram.

**Stories and statuses**

Telegram lacks the Stories feature of some competing messaging apps which lets you post images or short videos without messaging a contact directly. Admittedly it isn’t an essential feature for most people.

**Users**

Possibly the biggest disadvantage Telegram has over more popular messages is simply that: popularity. Despite its hundreds of millions of fans, Telegram is still leagues behind WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and WeChat in [active monthly users](https://www.statista.com/statistics/258749/most-popular-global-mobile-messenger-apps/).

If you’re in the West and you meet a new contact, the odds are they’ll prefer using WhatsApp to Telegram messenger. Popularity breeds popularity — trying to dethrone WhatsApp is an uphill battle for Telegram.