8 Helpful Holiday Apps

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As the joy and pain of the holidays descend once again to stupefy us all, it'll be nice to have a smartphone handy to do the thinking for us. Of course, you'll still have to be present, but provided you grab some of these useful (or at least distracting) apps, you should be able to make it through while devoting most of your brain power to guessing what's in your gifts.

The Christmas List (99 cents) by Limbua has been updated from last year to allow users to reference gifts from previous years without adding them to the list and to make it easier to give the same gifts to people, for uncreative types.

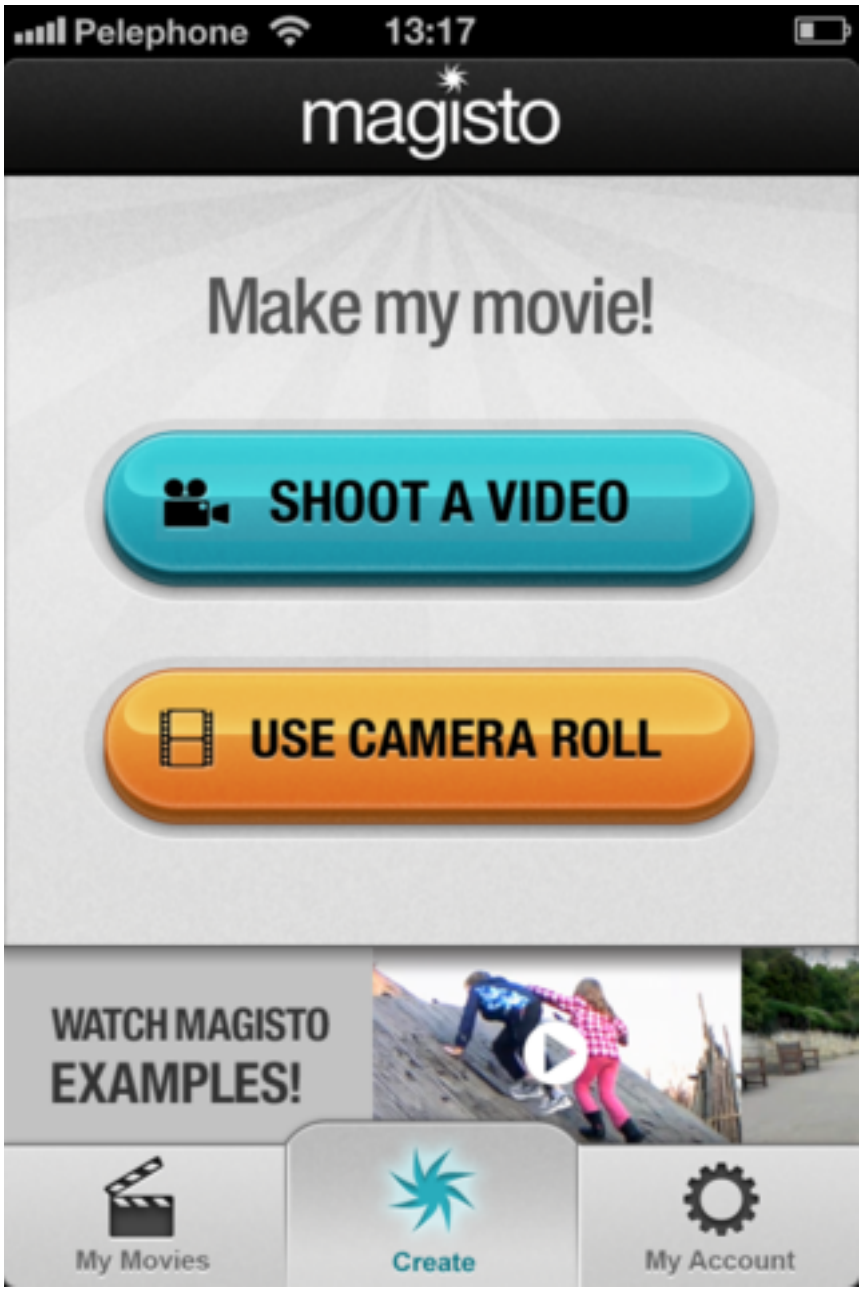
A Charlie Brown Christmas sits near the top of the list of nostalgic holiday TV favorites and has aged much better than those slightly creepy Rankin-Bass stop-motion specials. Now

the magic can live on your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch as well through the $2.99 app from Loud Crow Interactive, who made a similar, beautifully rendered pop-up book for Peter Rabbit. Plus, this format may finally get your kids to appreciate this classic.

Wishing for a white Christmas but only seeing that grey slush that accumulates on

the curb outside your window? Check out and stare at the **Snowfall Free Live Wallpaper** on your Android device. Kittehface Software's free app, which uses an approximate location to accurately display time of day, will soothe with steady drifting flakes and swaying pines. It's a perfect image to zone out on once you pass your threshold for talking to relatives.

Magisto takes the hard work, and most of the control, out of video editing, replacing it with a simple three step process: Shoot a video (the app prefers it be at least 45 seconds but you can use more than one), throw it into the app, and pick your music. Then wait 15-20 minutes while Magisto turns your raw footage into something a little more palatable, complete with a soundtrack plucked from the app's large library of licensed tunes or something already loaded on your device. You can create an account or log in using Facebook to access this free Android- and iOS-compatible app. Next thing you know, your video of the family football game will have transitions, a holiday border, and Wham!'s "Last Christmas" playing in the background.



Restaurant Story:

Christmas isn't really so much a game as it is a pleasant time waster. Decorate your cozy eatery for the holiday festivities while you prepare dishes to keep the customers happy and earn coins, jewels and stars. The repetitiveness of TeamLava's free game is genuinely calming, even if the customers leave angry, and there are no dishes to do, unlike in the real world.

Andres Canella's **Wake N Shake Alarm Clock**, on sale at the App Store and Google Play for 99 cents (normally $1.99), will help recreate the jarring wake-up experience of having hyperactive kids attack you on Christmas morning year-round. The simple alarm clock has a caveat: To turn it off, you have to shake the ever-loving stuff out of your smartphone. It's just recently added a social layer, allowing you to compete with friends over Facebook to see who's the best waker upper.

If you know anyone who thinks Christmas music just can't get any more annoying, unleash a tune with **Christmas Bagpipe Free** upon them. Like the name implies, this is a free app, for Android and iOS, and it allows you to simulate playing a bagpipe. You can try your hand at blowing your own air into the microphone or just set it to "Autoblow." The Christmas version comes with a festively decorated bagpipe chanter and Christmas song tutorials that involve following a snowflake around the holes in the chanter. But even if you get good at playing "Jingle Bells," chances are no one will want to listen.

FirePlace saves the day, removing the dirty maintenance and slight danger of owning and operating a real fireplace. ToughTurtle's 99-cent app for the iPhone and iPad combines the crackle of wood burning with music (if you choose). It's also AirPlay compatible, so you can put it up on the big screen through your AppleTV device. Warmth sold separately.

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