

KYLE VANHEMERT DESIGN JAN 22, 2014 12:30 PM

Horizon App Solves the Dumbest Thing About Smartphone Video

A new app captures proper horizontal video no matter how you're holding your phone.



Horizon keeps your video horizontal no matter how you're holding your phone. GIF: ARIEL ZAMBELICH/WIRED

 SAVE

IN SOME DISTANT future, when the aliens harvesting Earth's scant remaining resources are killing time by going through humanity's old viral videos, they'll come to one inevitable conclusion: *These people deserved their fate*. Why? On their sophisticated holographic displays, all of our best clips will show up as slender slivers of action, squished on both sides by thick black bars.

It's the defining scourge of the smartphone video age. When you shoot while holding your phone the normal way, in portrait mode, your clips take the shape of your screen. Then, when you go to watch them on your computer or TV they look ridiculous, occupying a skinny vertical stripe like you're watching the action through a picket fence. The internet has been trying to educate the public on this issue for years with little success. Thankfully, the developers at the Greek outfit Evil Window Dog have come up with a clever solution. Their new app captures proper horizontal video no matter how you're holding your phone.

›There's a clear reason for all the black bands we see in the wild.

Horizon, which you can download for \$1, automatically crops your clips into the proper aspect ratio on the fly, as you're filming them. The app uses the iPhone's gyroscope to keep itself steady, meaning you can switch from portrait to landscape (or linger on any angle in between) while you're filming.

It's not perfect. In the process of snipping a landscape image out of your portrait one there's a significant loss in quality, and the gyroscopic stabilization wasn't all that stable when I tried the app out myself. Plus, it doesn't work post facto; you have to remember to shoot in Horizon to begin with. I don't imagine that many vertical video culprits have been on the look out for a fix, if they even realize there's a problem in the first place.

Still, for all these faults, Horizon is a compelling solution, simply because it embraces the fact that shooting video vertically is a behavior that isn't going away. There's a clear reason for all the black bands we see in the wild: Shooting pics and video in portrait mode is way more natural than the alternative. In portrait, you can shoot comfortably with one hand. To shoot the "proper" way, you have to delicately

clench your phone's sides with your fingertips, making sure to keep dangling digits out of the frame.

Apple and Google, Listen Up

That brings us to an unexpected revelation. Maybe the vertical video people aren't the dumb ones at all. Maybe the real dummies here are the folks at Apple and Google who decided that the only way to shoot horizontal video is by holding your actual device horizontally. From what I can tell, there's nothing to prevent either company from implementing a solution like this on a system level. And why shouldn't we be able to shoot landscape video while holding our phones in the natural portrait orientation? Sure, you get a kind of awkward viewfinder glimpse of the action in front of you, instead of a faithful preview that stretches to all four corners of the screen. But who gives a rip. At least give me the option.

Of course, the issue also makes you consider if we're getting to a point where horizontal video isn't necessarily the "proper" orientation anymore at all. When you view a vertical clip on your smartphone, it feels perfectly appropriate, filling the whole screen. Instagram and Vine skirt the issue entirely by rendering their clips as squares. In both cases, the content is orientation agnostic. As we continue to shift our time from desktops to mobile, there may not be as clear-cut a case for shooting video in landscape to begin with.

In the meantime, in a world dominated by sideways-stretching screens, Horizon makes you consider that there's nothing stupid about holding your phone in the way that feels most comfortable. What's stupid, really, is designing camera software that willfully ignores that reality.

TOPICS APPS DESIGN

READ MORE
