SAMSUNG

Bark Technologies and the next generation Bark Watch

Developing a solution to the first device dilemma



When is a child ready for their first connected device? Parents want to reach their children, know where they are and recognize when they may need help. But a smartphone can also introduce unrestricted internet access, social media and contact with strangers before a child is ready. For families seeking a step between no device and a phone, the challenge is finding a way to give children more independence while keeping essential safeguards in place.

Bark founder and CEO Brian Bason faced this concern when he started the company in 2015. His oldest child was approaching the age when a first phone seemed possible. Even with a technology background, Bason could not find a solution that gave his family both connectivity and protection. He started Bark with a mission to help kids thrive online, stay safer and learn to use technology responsibly.

That principle shaped Bark's first app, which connected to children's devices and accounts to identify concerning activity across texts, email and social media. Bark later introduced Bark Home to extend screen time and web controls across the home network. When parents asked for a simpler device with built-in protections, Bark developed the Bark Phone on a Samsung Galaxy A Series platform. Its monitoring approach was designed to respect a child's growing independence: Bark's models examine communications for potential risks and alert parents to concerns that may require their attention, rather than giving parents a view of every routine conversation.

> "Our job is to make sure parents know about the things that they need to know about, but also give kids privacy when everything is going well."
>
> **Brian Bason,** Bark founder and CEO



"We want kids to have privacy, but parents also need to know when there's something that they need to deal with."

Brian Bason, Bark founder and CEO



Building AI models that understand how kids communicate

Balancing privacy with protection requires more than searching for alarming words. A short phrase can mean one thing in a friendly exchange and something else in a sustained series of insults. According to Bark CTO Brandon Hilkert, Bark receives 100 million to 120 million messages a day across its platform. Bark uses this volume of real-world language to train and refine models that recognize context, shorthand and the ways children's language changes over time. 'I hate you' followed by a smiley face may be playful, while the same phrase followed by repeated insults may indicate bullying. Reading the exchange in context helps the models identify when a parent should be notified without inundating them with false alarms.

When the models detect a potential concern, Bark alerts parents and suggests ways to start a conversation. An alert can draw attention to bullying, predation, self-harm or other difficult subjects before a parent might otherwise learn of it. Families can adjust alert settings as children mature, helping them focus on concerns that warrant their attention without being overwhelmed by false positives. Bark uses this approach across its product portfolio to help protect more than 7.5 million children globally.



100m-120m messages

Bark receives 100 million to 120 million messages a day across its platform.

The first device dilemma

A child may need to call home after school, text a grandparent or share their location on the way to practice. A smartphone can do all of that, but it also opens the door to browsers, social media, games and a much broader online world. Bark saw an opportunity to give families a step solution between no personal device and a smartphone. That need led to the first Bark Watch.

The watch serves children who need to reach family and start learning to use connected technology but are not ready for a smartphone. It gives them room to communicate and gain independence while providing parents with practical safeguards. Bringing Bark's approach to a wearable meant supporting both sides of the experience: simple communication and useful features for a child, with dependable monitoring and management for a parent. Bark's goal was to let children develop responsible habits with an age-appropriate device, while allowing parents to evolve permissions as their children grow. A watch could be the first step, with a phone coming later if and when a family felt ready.



Balancing what kids want and what parents need

Bark had some success with earlier generations of its watch. For the next generation, the company wanted to build on its existing foundation with a smartwatch that combined familiar design, enhanced performance, and integrated communication and safety features. The design also had to satisfy two audiences. Children wanted something comfortable and appealing, with features they could use throughout the day. Parents needed reliable communication, location information and a way to respond if a child encountered trouble. The watch had to serve both without feeling like a toy.





"It was really important for us to create something that didn't seem like a kid's toy. The watch needed to be robust. It's on a kid's wrist, and the kid's active. We wanted the next generation to look professional, dialed in and reflect the trust parents place in Bark."

Brandon Hilkert, Bark's CTO



The Galaxy Watch8 offered Bark an established consumer platform it could tailor to children and families. Its interface, applications and hardware gave the development team a strong starting point. Samsung's development tools and customization capabilities gave Bark room to shape which experiences would be available on a child's first device. Samsung had already refined the watch interface and core functions over multiple generations. For Bark, that reduced the work required to establish basic communications and gave its engineers more time to build the monitoring and parent experience that distinguish its products.

Built on the Galaxy Watch8, the Bark Watch operates as a freestanding LTE device with its own phone number. It does not require a child to own or pair a smartphone; parents manage it through the Bark parent app. Samsung's dual-frequency GPS supports location tracking, so parents can check where a child is.

Children can call and text, including group messages and speech-to-text, while parents choose how to manage contacts and receive alerts about potentially concerning communications. Bark monitors texts and photos or videos sent or received on the watch, although the watch itself has no camera. If a child needs help, holding a button brings up an emergency-call option to call 911. Parents can require approval for contacts or allow more flexibility as their child matures. These rules can vary by time of day, letting a child reach friends during appropriate hours while limiting communication to parents at other times.

An alarm, timer and calculator make the Bark Watch useful beyond safety check-ins. Smart health features include step count and activity goals. Bark leaves out browsers, social media apps and games. Children get a capable smartwatch with useful everyday features, while parents get a focused experience that reflects why they chose the Bark Watch as a first device.

Processing power, battery life and durability

Calls, messaging, location services, health features and Bark's background functions all draw on the processing power of a small device. The Watch8's processor and established interface support these functions together. Its built-in phone and messaging apps also let Bark focus development on its own strengths — monitoring, location tracking and parental controls — rather than rebuilding basic communications features. Samsung's existing applications gave children familiar, useful tools, while Bark's software could work in the background to surface concerns for parents.

Battery life was also a practical design constraint. Parents need the watch to be as available after school as at breakfast. Location updates, LTE communication, messaging and background protection all draw power from a compact battery. Bark and Samsung worked together to balance those demands.

Samsung drew on years of refinement across eight generations of wearables, including antenna and chipset design, to help Bark improve battery performance. Samsung shared lessons from earlier products that helped Bark optimize location tracking and other functions for the school day and after-school activities. That guidance was especially useful because more frequent location checks can increase power use. Bark and Samsung had to consider how the watch would perform across a child's entire day, including school, a walk home, sports and activities afterward, rather than optimize one feature in isolation.

Durability mattered, too. Children run, climb and bump into things, and parents expect the watch to withstand everyday wear. The Bark Watch uses the Galaxy Watch8's Armor Aluminum casing and carries an IP68 water- and dust-resistance rating.[1] Its 40 mm size and slim profile make it comfortable for children to wear, and its sleek appearance gives them a device they can enjoy showing off to friends.

"The watch doesn't do anyone any good if it's dead. Samsung worked with us to optimize settings in a way that maximized battery life without compromising the experience."

Brandon Hilkert, Bark's CTO



More than an app: Customizing the watch experience

> **"There are three things we really think about when we engage our partners — innovation, security and an open ecosystem. We worked with Bark to take the innovation we've built into Samsung's hardware, leverage Knox to open up that system and integrate it with an open ecosystem and their software to create an ultimate solution."**
>
> **Tyler Gipson,** Samsung SVP & General Manager, US B2B Mobility



The advantage of building on Samsung's Galaxy Watch platform extended beyond hardware. Samsung's SDKs and Knox platform gave Bark tools to customize the experience at a deeper level, while existing calling and messaging functions provided a familiar foundation. The companies could shape a distinct product tailored for families rather than simply adding Bark's software to a standard smartwatch. Bark's ability to customize the watch at the OS level is a particular advantage of the partnership with Samsung. Samsung provided the established user interface and underlying capabilities, while Bark decided how to combine them with its child safety software and which functions to keep available.

That flexibility let Bark retain useful watch features while limiting access to others, including an app store. Bark could build a distinct experience for children and parents on an established platform. The underlying Samsung Knox security capabilities also help protect the device, while Bark defines the controls families use.

Knox Manage supports the operational side of the experience. Bark uses the mobile device management platform to provision watches with Bark apps, restrict settings that could interfere with protections and distribute software updates to deployed devices. Those capabilities allow Bark to improve the product over time without asking parents to handle the technical work.

A partnership built around child safety

The latest Bark Watch builds on a relationship that began with the Bark Phone. Samsung's contribution went beyond supplying hardware: its engineers shared knowledge from earlier devices as Bark worked through battery life, location tracking and the watch's other requirements. Bark credited the Samsung team with responding quickly when its team needed guidance during development. That support was critical to Bark's rapid development pace. Samsung specialists made themselves available when the team needed answers quickly.

For Samsung, the Bark Watch shows how a consumer device can be tailored to a focused need through close technology partner collaboration. Bark contributes years of experience in child safety software and an understanding of how families use connected devices. Samsung contributes wearable hardware, development tools and engineering support. Together, they have created an experience designed to help families introduce technology at a child's pace.

The Bark Watch brings those strengths together in a first connected device that children can use throughout the day. Bark's monitoring and parental tools help families respond to meaningful risks while allowing children privacy in ordinary conversations. Samsung's wearable platform gives that approach a durable, customizable home. The result gives children room to communicate and build independence, with tools that help parents guide and protect them.



"Samsung's been an amazing partner for Bark. The combination of our software and the Samsung hardware has been an incredible differentiator for our customers."

Brian Bason, Bark founder and CEO

"This is a great example of how you can take world-class hardware with an incredible, innovative software company and develop a unique solution that delivers on a need that might not otherwise have been addressed. From our perspective at Samsung, we bring our engineering and battle-tested design to the equation. On top of that, from a support perspective, we work hand in hand with our partners. It's not just giving them advice and saying good luck. We're here to support development all the way."

Drew Blackard, Samsung SVP Mobile Products



"We are able to have a positive impact on millions of lives. We receive emails from parents telling us they received an alert from Bark that saved their child. Their child is still alive because of the partnership between Samsung and Bark."

Titania Jordan, Bark CMO and Chief Parent Officer



Contact us to learn more about developing solutions with Samsung.



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1. Consistent with IP68 rating, water- resistant in up to 5 feet of water for up to 30 minutes. Rinse residue / dry after wet.