



## Interview with Hesham Abdel-Wahab, co-founder of EgyptCarpoolers.com

# DIVE INTO THE POOL



### When did you first get the idea for a carpooling website, and what inspired it?

The idea for EgyptCarpoolers.com was conceived in 2008 on the 26th of July Corridor (more commonly known as 'El Me7war'). While stuck in traffic ElMe7war everyday on my way to work in Lebanon Square from Sheikh Zayed City and back, I realised that most of the traffic was made up of cars with only one passenger in them. Why, even I was riding in a car on my own! I thought: "Why don't people carpool?" Carpooling would reduce traffic, save money and even help the environment.

The answer was very simple. There was no means of communication to connect carpoolers. The only way someone could carpool is through co-workers or friends. But what if your co-workers or friends don't live or work near you? Perhaps there is someone out there who not only lives near you but also works near where you work. Wouldn't that be a great opportunity to carpool? But how can you find that person? Hence, a carpooling website.

### When did you launch the website, how did you set it up, and what obstacles did you face early on?

We launched the website in October 2009. The way it works is by simply going to [www.egyptcarpoolers.com](http://www.egyptcarpoolers.com) and register for free. Once you've created a profile, you either search through existing carpools or post your own carpool. Once the system identifies a potential match for your carpool request/offer, an automated message will arrive in your inbox to notify you of the details of the matched carpooler. The biggest problem we faced early on was related to technical development of the website, since none of the founders are experienced in web development. We had to outsource a company to build it for us.

### What are the main positive outcomes of carpooling?

#### Benefits of Carpooling

- Save on costs (gas, maintenance, car depreciation)
- Reduce traffic, thus save time to get to your destinations
- Save on parking costs/hassle
- Help protect the environment and reduce carbon emissions
- Conserve your energy (less stress)
- Make new friends

### How many people are currently involved in it, and is it growing? If so, at what rate?

Today, we have more than 2,500 members on the website. In the beginning it was growing at a fast rate because we were getting a lot of

media attention. But today, growth is slow since we are not doing any kind of marketing activities yet.

### Are there any measures taken in terms of safety precautions, having strangers in your car, etc. If so, have these safety precautions changed since the revolution, and the reduction in security and police forces?

The main problem we've been facing and which has many people sceptical about the whole concept is the fear of riding with someone you do not know! Even though Cairo is relatively safer than many other cities in the world that have been carpooling for years, people aren't really familiar with the concept. They may have carpooled with their friends, relatives or co-workers before, but the idea of carpooling with complete strangers might not be very appealing to some. We are acknowledging this factor and we know it will be some time before this kind of thinking changes. Meanwhile, we have added a list of safety tips in the 'Is it safe?' section of the site.

### How did you market/promote the site and is it in any way profitable to you?

In July 2010, we applied to a contest sponsored by Yahoo! called 'Social Innovation Starts with You' and we were one of the nine winners of the award. The award money is to be spent on improving and promoting the website. And no, the service we are offering is totally free.