

# Calm technology

Sociology, Communication



Calm Technology depends heavily on using notifications, triggers, ambient awareness, and persuasive technology in a more sensitive way—but those elements do not, by themselves, automatically create a calm experience. In many cases, a simple tone or light can convey the same amount of information as a full display or pop-up box, while being much less distracting. The underlying concept is to match the resolution of the notification with the amount and importance of information being conveyed. Learn this, and the specific applications become obvious.

By far the most utilized sense for technological notification is vision, which is why it is also the most cluttered. This chapter points out the many different senses you can employ to compress information instead of “causing” more visual clutter. Designing for calm interaction is largely a matter of finding nonvisual ways to communicate low-priority information. But underlying all of this is a question that very few designers ask themselves seriously: whether a notification is even necessary. There is a time, place, and context for notifications, and the trick to smooth computing is to work with your users to determine what is appropriate, helpful, and not distracting or anxiety producing. Just as we can get into trouble by creating a notification for everything that a device or piece of software does, we can also err by giving too few notifications.

Calm Technology does not automatically mean sparse communication; it means exactly the right amount of communication—not for the technology’s ability, but for the user’s needs. Alerts are usually hierarchical. Make a habit of testing everything you do in the real world to determine a hierarchy of information. Consider the primary focus of someone using your application or

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product, and ask yourself if any individual alert—like an emergency alert—is so important that it should remove the user from their current task. If so, consider structuring the alert so that it supports, rather than detracts from, the primary task. Cars, for example, are designed to give numerous alerts that enhance the driver’s ability to drive, such as a clicking turn signal indicator or a tachometer that moves into the red zone when your engine revs too high. [www. it-ebooks. info](http://www.it-ebooks.info) 3. Calm Communication Patterns | 83 The next chapter presents exercises designed to help you apply the principles of Calm Technology from the previous chapter and the calm communication patterns covered in this one. We’ll use a Calm Technology evaluation tool to better understand how objects interact with their environments.

**Key takeaways from this chapter:**

- Calm communication patterns can help to “ calm down” an otherwise overly demanding interaction or interface.
- Try to pay more attention to status lights in your environment. Where do they come from? What do they indicate?
- The timing of a status tone is important, as is how you experience it. A calm, welcoming sound can relieve tension in frustrated users even when inconveniently timed.
- When designing a status shout, first ask if the information you need to get across is truly urgent.
- Ambient awareness means a notification is present by default: opt out, rather than opt in. What aspects of your environment could communicate information ambiently?

- A good persuasive technology largely depends on taking what was formerly invisible (behaviors, decisions, unseen consequences) and making it visible. What invisible information would be helpful if it were to be visible?
- Consider how you could use external changes to trigger contextual notifications through each of the status indicators.
- What devices in your life could be improved by changing their communication style, and why?