

Distractions are an inevitable consequence of trying to get work done near a device. These distractions are neither fully good nor bad, for there are always times when an important text message or breaking news rightfully takes one away from his or her work. However, for every one of these worthy distractions, there are hundreds more notifications from useless apps. Making engaging products is a tough process that notifications disrupt far too often, and it is time to evaluate the standards that devices, and their consequential distractions, are held to.

Many apps focus more on gaining and retaining customers than anything else. However, although it is understandable for a business, it does not justify the harm it does to society. Being productive is difficult for many people, and apps commonly make this problem more abundant. An article written about the ethics and responsibility involved in computing says that it is a professional's responsibility to not only look out for the desires of a client, but also for their well-being (Loui and Miller). While someone is busy working, notifications make it all too easy for their focus to be broken with the simple ding of a phone. Technology should not be designed knowing that it will make a common struggle a greater challenge. 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 says that people should not only strive to seek goodness for themselves, but also seek goodness for others. Similarly, apps should not jeopardize the productivity of their users for their own gain.

Apps need to keep notifications to a minimum. Urgent notifications are the only kind that are always necessary, yet they are exceedingly rare. Many apps use notifications merely to reach out to those who have downloaded them and keep people aware of the app; they are advertisements. These types of unnecessary notifications should be avoided or done away with completely. During a test to discover the impacts texting has on crossing a street, it was concluded that the distraction primarily increased the time it took for the participants to begin crossing the street (Banducci). This example shows how distractions not only take people's minds away from more valuable information, but also take away their awareness.

Advertisements disguised as notifications are not a good reason to allow this level of distraction while people would be better off focusing on the road they are traveling through. Another way to reduce distraction is to decrease notifications as people use the app less. Sending an uninterested customer an overload of notifications will only diminish whatever goodwill they have with the app. Or alternatively, if someone is to use the app frequently, this person may find an occasional notification useful rather than burdensome. No matter how notifications are used, it is best for them to be used as rarely as possible.

Notifications are an everyday part of life, but they do not need to be. For many apps, the best option may be to end them all together. Apple has recently made a feature that deliberately turns off notifications while driving. This addition is long overdue as distracted driving has been a significant problem for decades, and its primary enabler is electronics. If a lack of notifications improves this area of life so much, then it may have related results if notifications are not enabled anywhere else. There are positive notifications, such as ones that may warn people of upcoming disasters, but with no notifications other than rare exceptions, it may have an exceptional effect on people. Or, if such a change is too hasty, then an alternative may be to enable notifications only if the user has been on their phones for a certain period or if they are using their devices consistently. Lowering notification quantity will have a positive effect on users and their capacity to avoid distraction. 1 Peter 4:8-10 calls upon us to love and treat others well, and so apps must be made to improve health and productivity rather than take them away.

Distractions are a burden that everyone must live with, but notifications make them that much more apparent. Limitations are necessary for improving productivity and having ground rules are crucial for ethical implementation of notifications in apps.

Works Cited

Banducci, Sarah E. "The Effects of Cell Phone and Text Message Conversations on Simulated Street Crossing." 2015, <https://hdl.handle.net/2142/78462>.

Loui, Michael C. and Miller, Keith W. "Ethics and Professional Responsibility in Computing." 2008, doi: 10.1002/9780470050118.ecse909.