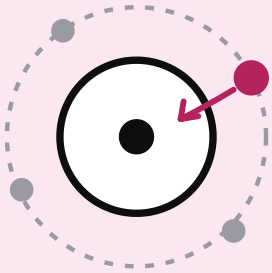
Concept

Calm technology

Technology designed to inform from the periphery of attention, without requiring us to look at it, and that moves to the center only when we need it.



In Spanish
Tecnología calmada

Origin
Weiser and Brown (1996)

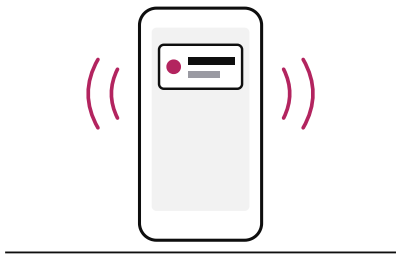
What problem it addresses

It explains why so many alerts are exhausting: every device asks for attention at once, and technology ends up bothering instead of helping.

An example

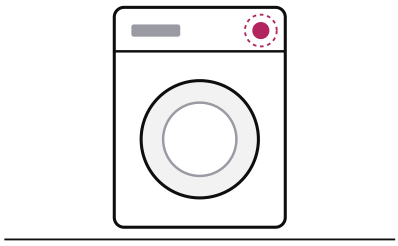
An illustrative example: two ways of knowing the washing machine has finished.

What demands attention



The phone vibrates and shows an alert, even if you are doing something else. **It interrupts.**

What stays in the periphery



A small light on the washing machine changes color, and you see it as you walk by. **It informs.**

Both give the same information, but only one makes you stop what you were doing.

Why it happens

1 

We attend to very few things at once.

2 

Everything else we notice out of the corner of our eye, effortlessly.

3 

And it moves to the center only when something changes.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Before adding an alert, ask whether it could be a discreet signal you notice in passing.

Avoid

Using sound, vibration and a notification for something that can wait.

Don't fall for it

Calm isn't invisible: if something is urgent, it has to be able to get attention.

6.9 → 9.5

What the research says

In an experiment, 48 people answered emails with and without interruptions every two minutes. With interruptions they finished somewhat sooner and without more errors, but their stress rose from 6.9 to 9.5 on a scale of 1 to 20 (Mark, Gudith and Klocke, 2008).

● ○ ○ **Single study.** It is a single lab experiment on the cost of interruptions. Calm technology itself is a design proposal that has barely been measured.

Connections

Used in

- UI design
- Haptic design
- Ubiquitous computing design
- Tangible interaction

Authors and works

1996	**Mark Weiser and John Seely Brown**	Proposed technology that moves between the center and the periphery of attention. Their example was a string hanging from the ceiling that twitched more or less depending on network traffic.
2015	**Amber Case**	Turned the idea into design principles and patterns for today's products.
2008	**Gloria Mark, Daniela Gudith and Ulrich Klocke**	Measured that working with interruptions increases stress and frustration, even if the task is finished sooner.

Sources

Original sources

- Weiser, M., & Brown, J. S. (1996). The coming age of calm technology. Xerox PARC (versión revisada de “Designing calm technology”, PowerGrid Journal, 1.01). View source (https://calmtech.com/papers/coming-age-calm-technology)
- Mark, G., Gudith, D., & Klocke, U. (2008). The cost of interrupted work: More speed and stress. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI ’08), 107–110. ACM. View source (https://www.interruptions.net/literature/Mark-CHI08.pdf)

Secondary sources

- Case, A. (2015). Calm technology: Principles and patterns for non-intrusive design. O’Reilly. View source (https://www.oreilly.com/library/view/calm-technology/9781491925874/)

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