

Little Signals: A Google multi-object system to deliver notifications in a gentler manner

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Credit: Little Signals

Engineers at Google have unveiled "Little Signals" a multi-object system designed to deliver notifications to users in a gentler manner than current systems. The unveiling comes courtesy of a [Google Experiments website](#) and accompanying [explanation page](#) that is part of an overall effort aimed at creating ambient computing.

The idea behind Little Signals appears to be a move to merge all of the [notification](#) signals that users are currently getting from their various devices and to convert them to signals that are gentler. Engineers on the project suggest that people are given signals in multiple ways, from the movement of hands on a clock, to the jangling of a smartphone, to timers that remind us to check the food on the stove or in the oven. They suggest that such a wide array of signaling could be contributing to stress in our private environments in subtle ways. To address such a problem, they have created six devices for placement at different locations in a given environment that are suited to the individual user. Each device has been designed to deliver notification signals in different and gentle ways.

One such device is called simply Air, and it sends notifications via puffs of air, similar, Google says, to the slight movement of leaves on a plant as they rustle in response to a slight breeze. Another is called Button—it grows as it fills with information, such as messages piling up in an email folder. Twisting it one way reveals more details, while twisting the other way reveals fewer details. There is also a device called Movement—it has seven pegs that are lined up and which rise and fall. It is meant to convey timer or calendar notifications.

Next is Rhythm. It is a bowl that emits gentle sounds that can be used to rate the quality of information. Users can wave their hand over it to change its settings or turn it over to shut it off completely. Then there is Shadow, a bowl shaped like a mushroom that moves up and down on its base in a breathing type manner—its rate reflects the degree of urgency of a notification. And then finally, there is Tap, which is just what it sounds like. It has an arm with a tapper on its end that taps something to remind you to do something—tapping on a pill bottle, for example, to remind you to take your medicine. Each of the devices can be customized to suit the individual user.

More information: littlesignals.withgoogle.com/

experiments.withgoogle.com/little-signals

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