

# Only Technology can save us from itself. By Tim Rundle, Conran and Partners

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**In the last decade, no other tech product has had more impact on the way we live than the smartphone. With hardware performance leaping ahead year on year, and the Internet of Things promising that everything from your front door to your lightbulbs will be controlled through your smartphone, there's a risk that being even more connected to our mobile devices will have an increasingly negative effect on our health, relationships and face-to-face interaction.**

**Can smarter products offer sanctuary from superfluous notifications, providing us with only the information we want, when we want it?**

Last week, Tim Rundle, Industrial Design Director, Conran and Partners gave a keynote at The Future of Wireless International conference at London's Emirates stadium. The event is a key date in the technology industry's calendar, hosted by Cambridge Wireless, and features presentations from experts discussing topics ranging from 5G and connected cities, to the much hyped 'Internet of Things'.

Tim's presentation proposed the notion that a major driver in making products smarter could be to help us become less connected. Here are some extracts from his keynote;

We are currently witnessing a huge amount of new product creation, defining new typologies in the field of connected objects. A significant number of the solutions that designers and engineers are creating now find their manifestation in an object that functions as a node in the 'Internet of Things'. Examples of IoT based concepts range from products for watering your plants more efficiently (Blossom), to improving your golf swing (Golfpad), or even keeping your feet cool (iGale)!?

With so many of these categories presenting opportunities for innovation through wireless technology, it's difficult to focus on which products will really be relevant to the majority of consumers.

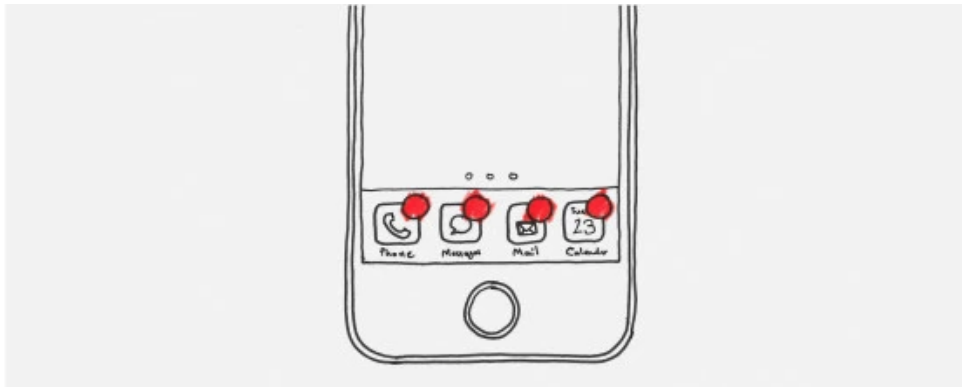
There's little doubt that future wireless products will be, and will need to be, so much smarter. They are going to have to be able to make many more decisions and learn more about us and our behavior, why? Because we are going to ask them to help make us less connected.

**Future wireless products will need to be so much smarter, to help make us less connected. Products that give us back some control over our appetite for information and enable us to cure our tech inflicted nervous twitches, our incessant down swiping to refresh, and constant pocket-ward glances in the hope of new notifications.**



Here at Conran and Partners, this new need has become a regular discussion theme for the Industrial design team, and we have started a self-initiated research project into how, with our experience in designing objects and systems for the spaces people inhabit as well as the spaces themselves, we can create products that deliver a sanctuary from superfluous information, without the need to go completely offline on a 'digital detox'.

With UK businesses losing 105 Million days annually (equating to £1.24 Billion) to stress related absences it's hard to argue that the ever present ability, and expectation, to be contacted, by your work or otherwise, is having a serious impact on our mental health.



Isn't it about time human behavior and needs started to positively influence this technology, rather than the other way around?

Through the proto-markets created by crowdfunding platforms we can already see potential demand for products addressing this new need, such as the lightphone. A minimal handset, that works in tandem with your smartphone, allowing you to leave the high-tech at home, taking with you a dumbed-down version of a mobile phone, which acts as a conduit for making and receiving only voice calls. No messages, no updates, no notifications, allowing your attention to refocus on non-digital experiences.

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Kovert, a recent startup has opted for a luxury approach, creating an information filter product called Altruus that adopts the form of a precious stone, and can be worn as a piece of jewelry, subtly notifying you of the arrival of only the information you really care about.

This desire to disconnect shouldn't be seen as a backlash or threat to the wireless industry, on the contrary, it presents an enormous opportunity. Products that are able to deliver to us only the content we really want, when and how we want it, are going to need to be incredibly smart, with enormous processing power. The leap in data accessibility afforded by 5G, and new faster mobile chips will be critical in the future products making up the Internet of Things, especially if they are going to become the silent helpers we really want, rather than objects that impose themselves upon our lives and demand ever more of our precious time and attention.



As producers, makers and designers we have always been taught to, and claim that we set out to create products and services that address a need or solve a problem. We've now succeeded in making products and services that have created a new need. Can technology solve this problem that it has itself created?

Absolutely, in fact I think technology is the only thing that can save us from itself.

### About The Author

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