

## - Gadgets

# How to reduce virtual noise

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Your phones, your tablets, and now your desk top computers and laptops, are all designed to distract. How do they distract you? Via notifications, pop-ups, news, new features and interface design.

The most obvious are phone notifications. By default, if you have a news app installed it will, provided your phone is connected to the internet, ping you every so often with new articles it thinks you might enjoy. That's really a naive way of putting it. More like, it will ping you with articles it thinks will engage you. So, the more sensational the article, the more likely you are to view it, and the more likely it is that you'll see advertising, and then the news site gets paid. That's the way it's always worked with news, but the danger now is that these apps, websites and advertising channels can connect with us 24/7, and have access to usage data which tracks what kinds of things you engage with. Which is deeply unhealthy, for a number of reasons. Given the tendency toward sensationalism – the fact that your fight-or-flight response gets engaged by articles which traumatise or enrage us – we have given these companies permission to hijack our nervous systems and make us uncomfortable, unhappy and angry, 24/7. Not a great way to live! But what I'm going to explain to you is some ways to take back control of your phone/tablet/computer, and thereby your nervous system.

The first method is disabling notifications. All modern phones/tablets and computer operating systems allow you to disable notifications for individual applications (or 'apps' as the kids are calling them) in your settings. The location of these settings differs from device to device, so you'll have to take a look around for yourself, but generally if you search for 'notifications' under your 'Settings' you should find it. Turning off notifications also generally means the app won't run in the background and contribute to slowing your device down.

A second method is just to disconnect from the internet. For a desktop or laptop computer this may not be appropriate or useful, but for tablets and smartphones it actually makes sense, as data & wifi use the most power out of everything on your phone, besides the screen itself. Turning these off not only disables notifications temporarily, it will also make your phone/tablet battery life longer, and also disables a certain amount of tracking or telemetry from that device about your activities and whereabouts.

The third method is to get rid of those apps. Do you really need that news app? And is the occasional interesting, thought-provoking article worth the screeds of target-marketed drivel that come out of it? Go through your apps, delete what you don't need and free up some space, and in the process free yourself up. Nobody likes a cranky person, but winding people up is what so much of the internet is about nowadays.

And the last method is to 'just turn the damn thing off'.