

# Stop Being a Slave to Your Smartphone by Restricting Sound Notifications to Phone Calls and Texts Only

*Shôn Ellerton, May 29, 2024*

*Many of us are unnecessarily bombarded with so many sound notifications from all our apps on our smartphones. But it can be controlled.*



If you're like me thinking that seemingly everyone out there wants to contact you or drop you a message through the growing plethora of apps and services we have at our disposal, you are not the only one. From Messenger, WhatsApp, Teams to those other lesser-known services and apps specific to particular requirements, such as organising school lunches and arranging sports days for your kids, there are simply too many of them.

It got to the point where my phone alerted me constantly, each app or service delivering a different sound, some of them intensely annoying with the sole intention to create a sense of urge and anxiety.

Two sounds come to mind.

The single ding bell sound but delivered with a whiplash-like intensity, and the other sound, a very heavy whirring vibration sound, like an angry hornet about to pounce on you. There are, of course, many others being equally annoying. The designers who created these sounds made it so as to be intentionally disrupting as possible. Thankfully, most apps and services have the ability to change the sound, but most people who install these apps tend not to bother with changing the default settings.

Naturally, I switch all the sounds off!

Now let me throw in an exception. If someone wants to call me or text me, I choose to have the sounds on for the obvious reason that one cannot hear if someone is calling you. There are times I have been near to turning off the sounds for texting as well because of the growing volume of promotion texts from advertisers who, somehow, get hold of my number. However, my family, friends and colleagues are well aware that I can normally be reached via text.

So, this leaves all the myriad of other services out there, most of which, I consider optional accessories or a 'nice to have'.

Take Messenger and WhatsApp, for example. Now and again, I might log in to see if there are any incoming messages, but I certainly don't want to be pestered continuously of every message that comes through. I've seen so many people addicted to picking up and glancing at their phones after *every* single little audible notification, even during a face-to-face conversation with someone else. It's not intentional and not meant to be rude, but it is an addictive habit which many of us may not be aware of.

The big question that is often asked of me is what happens if someone is trying to get hold of me. The answer is simple. Phone me, text me, or email me. However, I get the occasional pushback response, such as, being old-fashioned and not keeping up with the times or another, that I am being obtuse and purposely ignoring the other person out of some bizarre turn of spite.

On one occasion, a senior person at work sent a message to me via Microsoft's Teams which escaped me for the best part of two weeks. Now, let me just explain, that I had explained to this guy previously on several occasions, that I am usually immediately contactable with a phone call, text, or email. I was engaged with a client at the time and had my hands full, so to speak. I discovered the message and, rather than messaging back, replied by calling his mobile explaining to him that had I been called directly, I would have been aware of the message immediately. His response was borderline audacious and condescending retorting that surely, I can't have *that* many notifications coming through my phone.

This is the crux of the problem, and it is only natural and human. When we think we are sending an important message to someone, we often assume that the recipient will treat the message as equally important and will be attended to immediately. However, it is not that simple because it does not work that way for everyone. I turn off notifications from other apps because I do not want to be

visually or audibly distracted from every little message that comes from all the apps that I've installed on my phone.

Most of these messages are not terribly important. For example, someone might have sent me a link pointing to a podcast or video as a subject of interest. I'll get it in time at my leisure, but I certainly don't want to have it flashed on my phone, and then to tap it, key in my passcode, open the app, only to find it was some amusing but not very important video clip. Worst of all, are those notifications that come in, and after unlocking your phone, the message disappears leaving you with no clue from which app it belongs to. These are the notifications which I might stumble across weeks later! No doubt, I am sure there are drivers out there on the road doing just this.

Is it okay to disconnect, or at least, push back, on receiving the flood of notifications on your phone?

Absolutely!

Just make it clear to others that, should you want to be contacted with minimal delay, explain how. Email, phone, text, or, in the context of your local neighbourhood, even knocking on the door.

In the working world, Microsoft Teams users can receive hundreds of notifications, often useless because they have kept notifications on for comments in forums and groups. I don't want to be a slave to this phenomenon, and I suspect, many others do not, either. Like Zoom, Teams certainly has its useful side with respect to video conferencing, but largely, that is where it ends for me. Again, make it clear to your colleagues and managers that, should you need to be contacted, keep it old school.

Call, text or send a good old-fashioned email.

And with regard to Teams or other video conferencing tools, ensure to send conventional calendar invites via email.