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## A HEALTHY AMBIENCE

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Creating a  
Lifeline to the  
New Digital User



# INTRODUCTION

HAVAS LYNX is about to change its relationship status. For a long time we, along with the rest of the pharmaceutical advertising industry, have been flying solo: sending our messages out to target audiences and offering a lot of one-way communications. Thanks to new technology-and the new consumer it has bred, we're finally ready to engage in a deeper relationship.

Today, we're focussed on getting to know our new target: she's online, mobile, and connected to a large network of friends, information, and marketers who help her make decisions about what is best for her life and well-being. Our target is digitally savvy—but this has left her inundated with competing messages. Every day, she gets poked, pushed, tweeted, alerted and told what she might also like. At some point, the digitally savvy and well-connected user might just want to disconnect.

And that's where our challenge comes: how can we connect to the new digital user, meet her needs, and provide useful service without coming on too strong?

Basically, we did what anyone who was courting a stranger would do: we asked around.

In fact, we asked 502 online users about the usage and uptake of mobile applications in a survey. The key takeaway is that digital health really looks like a mobile business, built on a series of key moments where health brands have the potential to facilitate real conversations and mediate real human connections throughout the health journey.

Mobile is where brands can deliver the right information to patients and physicians at the right times—that is, as they need it. Through smart use of technology and psychology, brands can create tools and apps that support the users' needs rather than push blanket messages. Targeting human interactions at “key moments” gives us the opportunity to answer questions, provide comfort, and promote healthy and compliant behaviours and practices.

Through the digital, mobile, and social tools available now, we can create a meaningful dialogue with our consumer. It means we are there when she needs us, but we don't demand her attention and ultimately blend in with the myriad other digital interactions she ignores. The adoption of mobile leads us to the rise of “ambient healthcare”.

# EXPLORING THE IN BETWEEN

Nobody outside the science world used the word “ambient” until the mid-1970s, when progressive rock musician **Brian Eno** coined the term ambient music for a new type of atmospheric sound that he was creating. His ambient music was meant to be heard somewhere between “in your face” and the “back of your mind”. Ambient material is interesting enough to reward attention, but not so obtrusive as to demand it.



Although the “ambient” concept seems modern, it has a track record that spans centuries. Traditional ambient devices are a part of our mainstream life. One simple example is a clock—a permanent fixture almost anywhere you go, it provides constant updates, but you only receive the updates when you choose to. Today, there is a growing interest in the potential for ambient devices using digital technology.

The digital space has opened up whole new genres of updatable content, along with new ways to communicate the information. We’re interested in creating a digital ambiance: tools that fit discreetly into your everyday life, and deliver information in ways that, much like ambient music, reward your attention but don’t demand it.

Unfortunately, over time the “ambient” space has become pretty crowded. We’re surrounded by the by product of other activities: cars, trains, cranes, planes, creaky heaters, and cooling fans. And some ambient noise is meant to be deliberate messaging: music in public places, billboards, and—above all—more screens of every size in every space from Times Square, to TVs above restaurant bars, to back pockets.

What have we done to adapt to the ambient excess? Naturally, people screen out much of what goes on around them. We simply do not pay attention to it. Marketing professionals know it’s becoming much more challenging to deliver messages to people who shut out messaging.

This reaction is no doubt a natural protective response to an overloaded environment; there’s no benefit to constant awareness of the traffic noise or a flashing banner ad on a favourite web page. More and more people seek out what they want and filter out everything else.

On the other hand, there’s always the risk that, in screening unwanted information out, people miss out on information that may be important or beneficial. Fortunately, professionals who study perception are finding ways in which useful and desirable information can break through the clutter without adding to the noise.

# DIGITAL AMBIENCE: LESS EFFORT

MORE  
INFO  
+ TRE

Two fields of study help us understand when and where key moments to communicate arise: perception and cognition, and communication technology. Perception and cognition science maps how people become aware of relevant information and then process it. The study of information and communication technology determines how to categorise captured information, digitise it, and relay it to its intended audience. A few interesting examples of ambient “gadgets” that use modern technology have already hit the market.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ambientdevices.com/cat/philosophy.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/ews/2004/04/63093htmldiscoverine>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ambientdevices.com/cat/products>

Images p.7-9  
<http://www.ambientdevices.com>

In 2002, a group of MIT alumni set up a business called Ambient Devices to create ways of delivering “glanceable” information that is “neither worthy of interrupt (push), nor worthy of investing time (pull).”<sup>1</sup> One of their early products, the wireless “Orb,” became an instant hit with the current Technorati, such as Seth Godin and Paul Saffo.

The **Ambient Orb** is basically a glass lamp that glows in different colours and intensities to reflect the information it receives; it can track changes in information like stock indices (green for up, red for down), energy consumption, website traffic, or even the weather.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of which, they made an **Ambient Umbrella**, which has a wireless chip in the handle to make it glow and pulse when rain is forecast, prompting the owner to remember it. Handy, right? The Energy Joule monitor plugs into any electrical outlet and displays the current price of energy and level of consumption in the user’s home.<sup>3</sup>



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**“Ambient awareness may help people learn faster, share faster, be more prepared, and meet problems as-or even before-they arise”**

## IN FOCUS

### Brave New World of Digital Intimacy



Tools and devices like these show one facet of ambient's influence. The current reigning social media demonstrate a different side of it. Programs like Twitter and Facebook have conducted large-scale trial-by-fire experiments on how to offer users information. Clive Thompson dubbed the phenomenon "Ambient Awareness" in his controversial 2008 The New York Times article, "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy".

The article explores varying attitudes toward—and the effect of—the constant stream of information we receive about the lives of others from social media. He basically concludes two things. First, that any individual update or communication may seem trivial (i.e., "Overslept and missed my bus this morning"), but the snippets add up over time to create a whole portrait, like the dots on a pointillist painting. And, secondly, the constant stream of information, which is available without the user having to really look for it thanks to features such as Facebook's News Feed, allows us to stay updated on thousands of people—a feat that would be truly impossible in real-life communication.

What do those conclusions mean for health? Basically, social media and new digital devices can use ambient messaging to amplify human awareness far beyond anything found in nature. What humans lack in natural sensory acuity, we are quickly making up for in digitally augmented awareness. Gradually, through a classic combination of scientific investigation and mass trial and error, we are developing systems to deliver valuable information in that space. When it comes to communicating health-related information, ambient awareness may help people learn faster, share faster, be more prepared, and meet problems as-or even before-they arise.



# AMBIENT HEALTH AWARE NESS



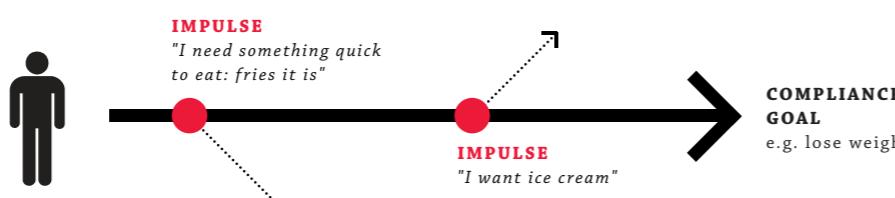
**“Looking to the medium**  
*Ambient information*  
*changes behaviour by*  
*presenting individuals*  
*with key information at*  
*key moments. ”*

Applying ambient awareness to the health landscape has many potential benefits, but the most glaring opportunity lies in compliance. Health maintenance and medication compliance are notoriously difficult areas to crack.

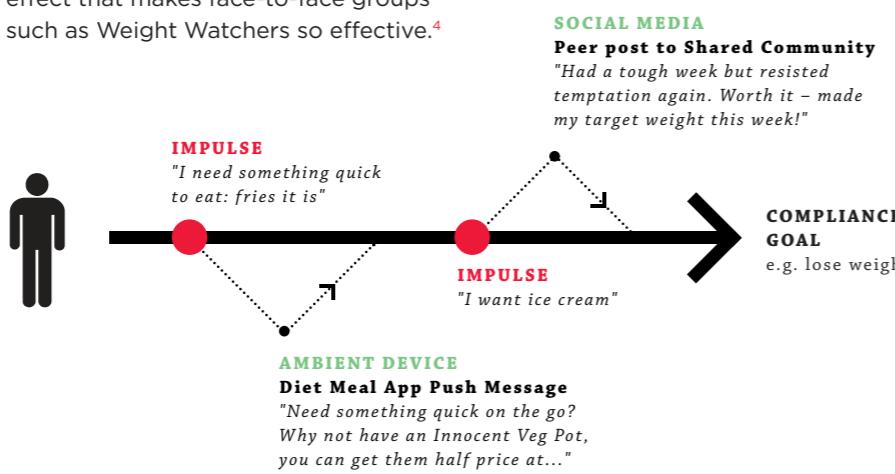
Everybody has been warned for decades that smoking causes serious health risks, yet some people still smoke, even some who have previously decided against it. Everybody knows exercise is important, yet far from everyone does something about it. Anybody with a health condition such as diabetes or hypertension knows it's essential to manage their condition and take their medication, yet, all too often, these things slip.

It's the timeless conflict between long-term goals (e.g., reduce weight, get fit, manage disease) and short term stimulus- and impulse-driven responses (smoke that cigarette, grab that cake). The issue common to these situations is not a lack of information—people know what they are supposed to do to take care of themselves. Rather, it's not having the right information in the right form at the moment of impulse. Ideally, individuals should remember their goals at crucial moments, but, in practice, this is tough; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Ambient health communication looks like a factor that can shift the balance and make a significant difference.

One way that ambient information changes behaviour is simply by presenting individuals with key information at key moments. One example is an air quality sensor that alerts asthma sufferers to critical pollution levels, and reminds them to take the recommended dose of medication.



Another way to change behaviour is through social media: individuals share health information (e.g., weight lost, calories consumed, distance walked) with a select group of contacts. They then see others' updates and, in turn, share their own updates, creating the sort of peer effect that makes face-to-face groups such as Weight Watchers so effective.<sup>4</sup>



The team at Ambient Devices says, "ambient awareness of information changes behaviour."<sup>4</sup> The company has explored ambient displays geared to motivate medication and exercise compliance, as well as ambient displays for body metrics, such as blood pressure, as well as for behaviours that influence health such as the number of steps walked.

Information that once had to be actively "pulled" (i.e., sought out by the individual), can now be provided through ambient display technology in mobile and social programs that already exist. RSS feeds and apps could display not only user-created social interactions, but also data such as pollen counts or pollution levels.

And condition-specific apps could use these data to make recommendations to individuals at the appropriate times. For example, an allergy sufferer's program would send a message like "Remember to take your allergy medication today" when high-pollen count data are received.

Tools like scales, pedometers, or blood pressure monitors could be configured to automatically track results, allowing people to see their progress at any time. That individual data could be made uploadable, so that it is available to the individual wherever they are.

Until very recently, simple metrics such as blood pressure and biosensor data including blood counts could only be obtained from a visit to a health professional. Now, automated home testing equipment makes it possible for individuals to keep track of such health information and feed it into ambient devices.

## CASE STUDY



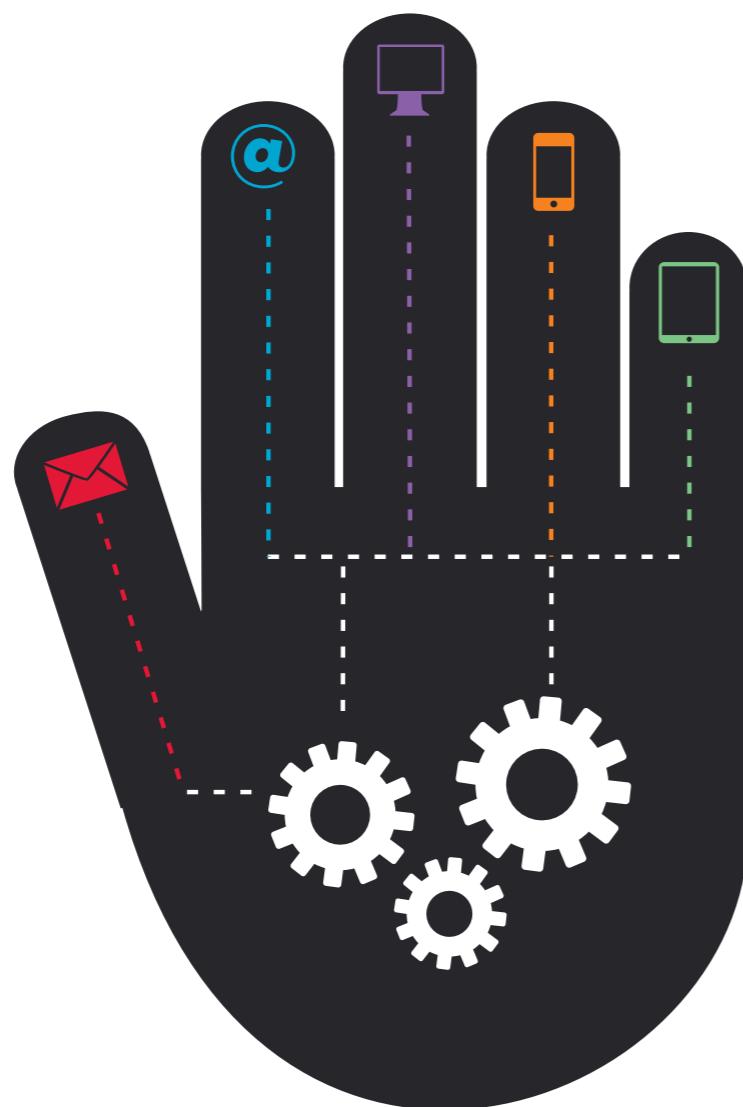
In Europe, a project called SmartHEALTH<sup>5</sup> has been focusing on monitoring at-risk cancer patients via a wireless-enabled home testing station—combining biosensor technology with information technology, wireless communication, and biostatistics. SmartHEALTH's broader objectives include showing ways in which Ambient Intelligent (AmI) medical devices and online services can contribute to pervasive healthcare provision.<sup>6</sup>

For healthcare professionals, ambient health communication offers the prospect of new methods of achieving more effective patient care, potentially at lower long-term cost. For consumers and patients, it offers incentives to set goals (e.g., lose 5kg, take medication on time every time) and in-the-moment "nudges" to keep them on track. By gently making them aware of information that's relevant to their health and wellness needs, ambient information can help them be better informed and more considerate in their actions.

This is very much in line with LYNX thinking about the emergence of mindful consumption. And that brings us back to our original interest: syncing up with that digital user.



# ACHIEVING UPDATED STATUS WITH A NEW DIGITAL AUDIENCE



For marketing and advertising professionals in the healthcare space, ambient information poses a threat, a challenge, and an opportunity.

## **THREAT**

The threat is that the more our new target tunes in to ambient health information that is relevant and useful to her, the more she will screen out unwanted and intrusive communication. She's not playing hard to get, but it will be genuinely harder to get on her radar.

## **CHALLENGE**

The challenge is to become the relevant information she wants to connect to, and that means being mindful marketers: genuine, informative, and well-placed. We need to pick our spots, so to speak. More importantly, it means resisting the temptation to push hard-sell initiatives that will end up spoiling the ambient space and turning her off.

## **OPPORTUNITY**

The opportunity is to help clients create communication that satisfies their business needs and benefits consumers' health needs. LYNX is committed to spearheading this opportunity by meeting the new user on her terms—setting a healthy ambience in the mobile space. ☺

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