

# The Keep-In-Touch Phone: A Persuasive Telephone for Maintaining Relationships

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## INTRODUCTION

People are frequently geographically separated from friends and family because educational and career opportunities require them to live great distances apart. Relationships are sometimes neglected and friendships wane, simply due to lack of the contact afforded by geographic co-location. For busy people it can become too difficult to remember and to find the time to call an old friend from college, or a former neighbor in the city where we used to live.

The Keep-In-Touch Phone (KITPhone) is based on the idea that the telephone is a tool for bringing people together. The KITPhone delivers periodic reminders to mobile phones to encourage users to keep in touch with those people in their lives with whom they have drifted apart. A scheduling feature that evokes a social commitment on the part of the user accompanies these reminders.

Though mobile devices have been used as tools of persuasion before [2], the KITPhone is the first, to our knowledge, to use the mobile phone to stimulate behavior change *in the domain* of the telephone. This tighter coupling of the persuasion source and the intended behavior target may result in more effective persuasive technologies.

## PERSUASIVE TECHNOLOGY

The KITPhone is a persuasive device. The workings of human psychology can be exploited, for good or bad, to influence the behavior of others. The KITPhone takes advantage of two principles in particular, reciprocation and commitment [1]. People seem almost compelled to give back when given to (reciprocation) and to be consistent in their choices (commitment). The emerging field of captology applies these theories and others like them to

computers, demonstrating that computers can be agents of persuasion [2]. Computers can persuade continually, and can collect data with which to form targeted persuasive messages and present those messages at the *point of decision*. This is especially true with mobile devices [2].

Mobile phones are a good technology platform for reminders of this kind for a variety of reasons. First, the telephone in general is nearly ubiquitous. Second, mobile phones are virtually always with the owner, making it likely that a delivered message will reach its intended recipient in a timely manner. Lastly, mobile phones are already conceptually linked with the idea of maintaining social information. They typically include address lists used to manage social contacts. This idea can be extended to include proactive social maintenance like the reminders and scheduling of the Keep-In-Touch Phone.

## THE KEEP-IN-TOUCH PHONE

The KITPhone was developed in Java for the Motorola T720 telephone. Because the API does not allow access to the phone's internal software, we simulated the address book and calling functions, and focused on developing as simple and usable an interface for our prototype as possible.

The reminder interface must be simple enough to be assessed and dismissed rapidly and at a glance, so as to not be burdensome or disturbing to the user. Each interface screen has been designed so that users short on time can make rapid decisions about what to do without considering the exact nature of the reminder message.

The reminders make the user aware of two types of social relationship in need of maintenance. First, there is the relationship that the user knows needs upkeep. For this kind of relationship, persuasion is vital; the user knows a call would be appropriate, and some prodding would be welcome. The second sort of relationship is the kind that the user does not remember or realize is lagging; for this kind of relationship, reminders serve as memory aids for an ever-increasing number of social contacts.

## REFERENCES

1. Cialdini, R. *Influence: Science and Practice*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Allyn and Bacon. 2001.
2. Fogg, B.J. *Persuasive Technology: Using Computers to Change What We Think And Do*. Morgan Kaufman Publishers. 2003.