



Update Alerts

Best Practice: How to Implement Update Alerts

Short update alerts can be a highly visible and effective means of informing users of important and personally relevant changes. We can use update alerts to inform users of general changes (i.e., those that relate to the overall user experience) or of context-specific changes, such as bulletins showing users what status updates their friends have made whenever they log in to their personal homepages. Implementing update alerts involves these steps:

- 1** | **Condense each individual update into a small piece of information**, without sacrificing the meaning of the event. For example, someone might have uploaded a photo from a recent visit to the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City and have tagged a number of people. While the users who know this traveler might be interested to know all of this information, they only need to know what *type* of activity has taken place, so they can investigate further if they wish to do so.
- 2** | The updates should be a *snapshot* of the activities from the user's friends and family, rather than an exhaustive catalogue of all the events ever to have taken place. Therefore, **starting the updates from a certain time** is the best idea, such as updates from the day or week the user has signed in.

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- 3 | The updates should ideally **contain inline links** that navigate the user directly to the related contents, saving that user from having to wade through the people's accounts. Generally, you should ensure the user can go to the event itself within the other user's timeline and can click through to the other person's account. For example, the user's profile image might appear at the head of the update, which the user can click – diverting him or her straight to that person's account.
- 4 | **Ensure the update alert is eye-catching**, without dominating the whole screen. In order to draw the user's attention to the alert, the background is usually 'greyed-out', but still visible, which gives the appearance of a figure/ground distinction, so the updates seem more prominent within the display.
- 5 | While updates might be interesting to users, users must be able to close the update panel quickly. Once the panel is closed, **allow the user to resume his/her original activities immediately**.

