



Overwhelmed with phone calls and can't afford a secretary? Try a squirrel. MIT Media Laboratory grad student Stefan Marti has built a Bluetooth-enabled animatronic rodent that can manage your calls for you. Like a good assistant, the device gauges how important a caller is and how busy you are before it decides whether to bother you or take a message. Marti says that telecom companies are interested in the critter.

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Executive Squirrel



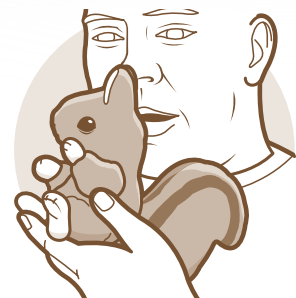
1 In between calls, the squirrel curls into a ball, making occasional slight movements as if it were asleep. A wireless sensor network connected to the device monitors the sounds in the room to see if you're busy or slacking off.



2 When a call comes in on your cell phone, the squirrel picks it up wirelessly and weighs its importance by asking the caller a few questions and looking up his or her phone number on a list of callers you've deemed "friendly."



3 If the critter decides you're too busy for a call, it sends it on to voice mail. But if the call makes the cut, the device starts shimmying to get your attention; the more important the call, the more furious the squirrel's movements.



4 If you trust the creature's judgment, just press its paw to take the call: the squirrel has a speakerphone built into it. To send the caller on to voice mail despite the squirrel's advice, press its foot instead.

COLIN HAYES (ILLUSTRATION); COURTESY OF STEFAN MARTI (PHOTOGRAPH)

