Data app keeps people in the know

Scenario
In the early hours of the morning, James is making his way to the beach, having left the house only minutes after waking he jumped straight on the bus from there. James has not seen the news since five o’clock the previous evening, and hasn’t heard of the tsunami warning announced in the early hours of the morning. It being too early for lifeguards to start their patrols, James enters the water completely unaware of the potential life threatening danger he is facing.

Proposal
Most people like to follow the news, generally to stay up to date with what’s going on in the world around them. However it’s not always convenient nor practical to be watching the television, checking online, or listening to the radio in case news breaks, and even if you are “tuned in”, there is no guarantee that your source will be covering up to date events, and you may miss them completely until your next check.

Most people in their day to day lives will have experienced this at some point, where they are out of the loop during a major event. As demonstrated in the example above, this can not only be annoying, but also life threatening.

My proposal is to develop an interface using Max that provides a non-invasive audial cue to let those within earshot know that news is breaking, based on the comparison of a number of online information feeds, including the major news outlets; the Google, Yahoo and Twitter trending topics and other up to date sources. The user will be able to provide terms to look for in the news, and provide a distinct pulsing tone if these are in any news stories.

The patch will have two distinct modes. The first, “buzz mode” constantly generates tones for unread stories, where the pitch and tone colour is affected by the “tone” of the news item, and the frequency’s volume is relative to its popularity/priority in the news media at that given point. In this way someone sitting in an office with this patch running the background could know that an entertainment story has slowly been gaining traction throughout the day, a new story involving the terms “traffic” and “pacific highway” (values input into the program) has made some ripples earlier on (so the user will be staying later to avoid this traffic) and a serious story has suddenly broken and gained a lot of traction within minutes, which involves their home suburb.

Alternatively, users will be able to select to only be presented with a short beep at regular intervals when a major story has broken. An example of the kind of event that would trigger this would be the likes of a natural disaster, terrorist attack, the death of an icon, or any other item that would create a spike and lead to instant blanket coverage across all news sources. Obviously this part of the patch would very rarely do anything, but may be invaluable to the user when it does.

Graphical Interface Visualization
As far as research goes, I have found a number of patches that do individual parts of what I described above (such as pulling an RSS feed from the web), and I will be aiming to cannibalize these in order to produce a working result, and the script I borrow from in the final product will be referenced in the patch.