# The epic story of Blinky

How an idea born at the lunch table turns into a handcrafted connected device, delivered on every colleague's doorstep, in only 3.5 weeks. The story of Blinky started just like many more typical Xpirit stories do. On Friday, December 3, while having a nice lunch with a bunch of Xpiriters, someone spoke the magical words: "we should do something creative for an end-of-year gift. Something crazy." Now, as you may know, we use a mantra at Xpirit: Do Epic Shit. It's what we do. And we love that so much, we have created a logo and t-shirts of it. How we came up with that mantra is a whole other story by the way. Very much worth reading, but let's focus on the story of Blinky.
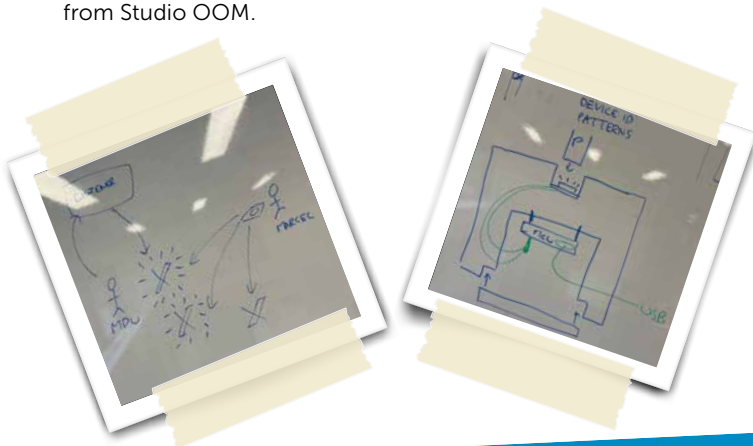
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While trying to evolve 'something crazy' into something achievable, we came up with the idea to create a Christmas version of our Do Epic Shit t-shirt with actual lights on it. That idea quickly evolved to a big button at the office, so if someone needed help, they could press the button and the lights on the t-shirts would blink. After discussing the possible dangers of electrocution, we decided that it might be best to do something crazy but safer.

However, we did like the idea of a button at the office that we could use to call for help and also the use of our Do Epic Shit mantra. And so, someone said: *"maybe we could create something, like a bat-signal, in the form of our Do Epic Shit logo!"* And there it was, the conception of Blinky. But what would it look like? What should the 'thing' do? And could we manufacture and deliver it before Christmas? The next few minutes, the wildest ideas flew over the table. We decided to think about it and involve our creative genius, Olaf Walther, from Studio OOM.

### The first sketches
On December 6, the WhatsApp Group 'Epic Shit 2021' was created. We came up with the idea of creating a Christmas package with a Christmas edition of our t-shirt, but without electronics, and creating the Do Epic Shit logo in plexiglass with LED lighting. That would be our bat signal. On Friday the 10th, we brainstormed with Olaf on how to create all of this, and we came up with the sketches.

## "Maybe we could create something, like a bat-signal, in the form of our Do Epic Shit logo!"

Then the idea evolved to creating an XKea DIY kit with Swedish instructions. But, for the sake of quality, we decided to assemble the device ourselves at the office. We did, however, like the 'XKEA DIY' thing, so we thought of a Swedish name for the device and an XKea instruction manual.

The box in which the device would be delivered would also have to be epic, of course. So, what would the design of the box look like? Again, we discussed many ideas, from retro branding to Orwell-style and a superhero theme. The last one made the link to the bat signal quite nicely, so we decided to go with that.

Then the materials we would need to assemble the device. We required 70 MCUs, 1.5 meters Douglas Wood beams, 2m² 10 mm plexiglas, 10 meters Led, 70 customized boxes. And remember, we wanted to deliver the package before Christmas. We're talking December 13 now. Next, we asked ourselves what kind of bat signal we would create. The first was flashing violently for 10 seconds. Then we came up with the idea to send "epic shit" in morse-code as an easter egg.

On December 14, we all gave an update in the WhatsApp group about the project's status and what was left to do.

We were still in the process of digitalizing the drawings and creating the device code. Luckily, most of the materials were received, but not everything. At this point, we had two questions left: what kind of slogan would we engrave on the foot of the device, and how would we deliver the packages to our colleagues?

### The machine that goes BLINK
Again, as things often go around here, many slogans were dropped in the chat. Some excellent examples: "Allo Allo Nighthawk, this is London Calling!" Or: "In case of epic emergency, this sign will flash!" But the next day, one of our brilliant Xpiriters came up with the absolute best: "The machine that goes blink." If you don't know why this is the best slogan, watch this Monty Python video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wd9NQxIeAAc. After some discussions, we decided to go with this one. But we also wanted to name the device to use in our day-to-day conversations. We quickly came up with Blinky. And finally, on December 16, we had a name, a slogan, and a design for the box.

On December 17, we still had some challenges. We had not yet decided on how to deliver the packages. In-person delivery would be more personal, but it also would be quite a challenge logistically. On the other hand, how reliable would the courier services be around Christmas? in addition, all the materials had still not been delivered. We also didn't have a date to assemble all the devices, and finally, we had to write instructions so everyone could connect Blinky to their wifi. There was also some good news: although the morse code didn't work yet, the connectivity and colors per device did work.
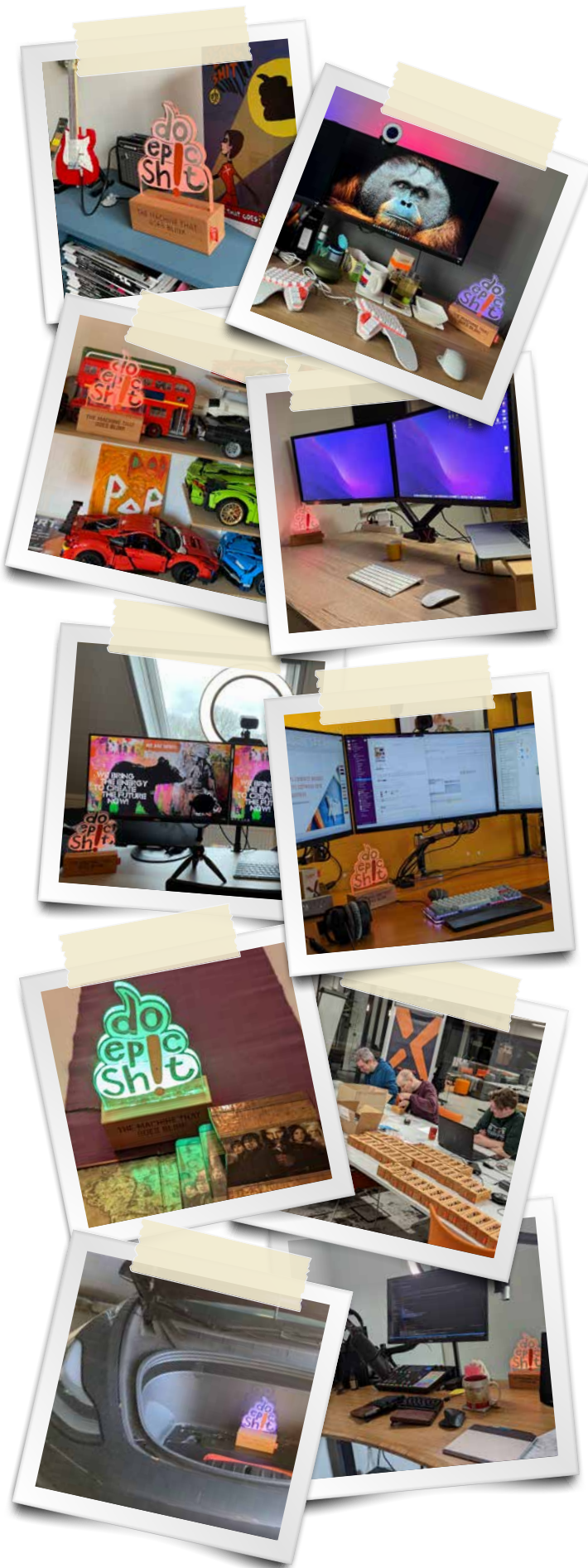
### Powered by log4j
Being a cloud consultancy company, we have some colleagues who are very keen on security. So, Marcel dropped a remark: "If we want to connect the devices to the personal wifi of our colleagues, some of them will for sure have questions about safety. How are we going to handle this?" That was a good question. We thought about a disclaimer, but then Matthijs came up with a genius idea: "Updates will be deployed remotely via log4j" (if you don't know about the log4j hack, read this blog post by Jesse Houwing https://jessehouwing.net/azure-devops-patch-for-log4j-vulnerability/). We all agreed this was genius, so that's how "powered by log4j" ended up on the box.

### Assembling 70 Blinkies
Although we still didn't have the cables, on December 19, we agreed we would assemble the devices on December 22. There was a lot of work to be done before we could start building. During the night of Sunday, December 19 to Monday, December 20, around 3:14, Olaf showed us what his workbench looked like after many hours of milling (Thanks, Olaf!). But the job was almost done. On December 20, we decided to deliver the devices to our colleagues' doorstep by courier.

Then, on December 22, it was D-day. We wanted to assemble the devices at the office. Therefore, we had to wait until the evening so the office would be empty because we wanted to keep it a surprise. After some delicious pizza, we started assembling. We divided the tasks and started working. As you can imagine, the joy was great when the first Blinky morse signals blinked.

Around 11:30 PM, every device was assembled, and we carefully cleaned up the evidence.

### Delivery and sending messages in morse

On December 27, the first Blinkies were delivered. After the first delivery, the Xpirit WhatsApp group exploded.
The colleagues who received it were very excited but didn't post any spoilers, other than that an epic gift was on the way. Every time a Blinky was received, there was an enthusiastic reaction in the group. And so, Chris changed the subject of the WhatsApp group to has *your package already been delivered*. After sending the first message (which was pretty simple, just 'Blinky') through morse-code, the group exploded again. Everyone was as busy figuring out how to decode the message. Most of the Xpiriters figured it out pretty quickly. During the next week, we sent a message each day like, 'take me places', 'feed me', 'I'm tired', and 'why am I here'. This resulted in some nice pictures that were dropped in the group.

The last scheduled message was sent on New Year's Eve: Happy new year!

That was the story of Blinky. In 3.5 weeks, an idea, born at the lunch table, evolved from a lit t-shirt to a connected device, all handcrafted by Xpiriters and, of course, Olaf. It's typical of Xpirit; that's how things often go. We start with an idea and take it a few levels higher. We want to thank every Xpiriter who has contributed to Blinky and Olaf Walther from Studio OOM, and we are looking forward to doing more Epic Shit together.  </>

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