

Electronic distractions may be our undoing

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One way to boost our will power and focus is to manage our distractions instead of letting them manage us.

??Daniel Goleman



The world is filled with distractions. In fact, anything can become one if we let it.

The problem is, our distractions are becoming the norm, and we're almost addicted to them, much to the detriment of our lives. A short 10 years ago, no one ever heard of an iPhone. There were no smart phones, tablets, facial recognition or Siri. Netflix didn't stream into Canada until 2010. Few TV sets surpassed 40 inches and sales of LCD models boomed.

The Internet has evolved from a passing fad or additional medium to a vital component of daily life.

Since 2010, accessing the Internet from our phones has skyrocketed from 23 to 84 per cent. Use of smart phone email has nearly quadrupled from 21 to 79 per cent. The use of mobile apps increased from 49 to 74 per cent. GPS location service use has gone from 12 to 71 per cent.

The percentage of people who stream music on their phone has increased from 13 to 67 per cent.

As you can see, we're addicted to our distractions, at record levels. Although I will admit that GPS is one of the coolest things ever. Most see this as a good thing. We're much more connected, making society a better, more rounded, happier and safer place. But is it? I would think that with the world's knowledge at our fingertips, some of those hours spent on iPads and iPhones could be used researching world religions; discovering what North Korea is really all about; finding better health practices, and saving the planet from its human inhabitants.

Being more aware and more informed should motivate the citizenry to be more engaged. But that doesn't seem to be happening. Voting levels here in Canada over past few years have been stagnant at best, declining at worst. We inundated with the flavour of the day, and bombarded with half-truths, weird stories, depressing events and yes, fake news.

We devour it all, with an almost voracious appetite.

One would think that such a vast amount of knowledge would increase our intelligence. Being connected to the world should improve tolerance, understanding and compassion.

Is there any evidence of this actually taking place?

From what I've seen over the past couple of years, organized hatred is at its height. Divisiveness is tops and anyone is fair game in the vastness of our social networks.

We are perpetuating the very worst in our kind, through something that was supposed to bring us all closer together.

In the past, troubles at home centred around work, stress and cost of living.

Today, many of these discussions are no longer taking place, because we're glued to our TVs, laptops or smart phones. We're surfing the net in search of distractions more than we're talking around the dinner table.

I'll admit I'm guilty of this, too. I was the last in our household to get my own iPad from my wife as a gift. It has evolved into a totally new appendage. Yes, I do use it as a distraction, a way to unwind and unclutter every evening. At times, I'm so bad that

I have my iPad in one hand and the TV remote in the other!

My wife sees it as an impediment. My attention is fixed on this little screen. The warm, comforting lights don't judge, they love! They let me into an exotic virtual playground to test my wit, knowledge and chess skills. This tiny window on the world lets me shop online and buy cool stuff from around the globe.

Alas, such distractions are becoming a force to be reckoned with.

My wife is right; she often is. What has happened to us?

For me, the Internet is my new addiction of choice.

Of course, I can rationalize my behaviour. I can rationalize anything!

The increased stress levels today create a greater need for diversion and amusement. It's fast, easy and in most cases, cheap. You simply hit a bunch of keys or buttons and you're whisked away, to a world of bewilderment and engrossment.

Sounds enticing, doesn't it?

I can navigate around websites with the best of them. I can roam through my desktop and find solutions quickly. I can find answers to almost any question in seconds!

But this preoccupation does little to improve my familial relationships. I am going on a strict diet, to shed some unwanted lost hours with my face glued to a screen!

What will the 'new me' look like? Time will tell.

Perhaps we can all use a dose of reality, and one-on-one interaction.

This lifestyle change is healthy and will, in the end, provide more emotional support. It will allow us to reconnect in the real, physical sense, with eye contact!

You could say that our electronic dependency has whittled away at our humanity. We're meant to get up, get out and be social creatures. We're meant to explore and learn. We're meant to help one another in times of need.

In the coming months, I think I'll leave the phone in the car, and find a nice little diner or coffee shop without Wi-Fi!