

determination to make a living from his artwork.

When we focus too much on gaining the approval of others, we not only lose sight of what is actually important to use, we focus on the things that we simply can't change. What we can control are our own actions and behaviors. What we can't control is other people's actions or opinions of us. Focus on your own actions and improve upon those. Stick to improving your own skills and the process in which you get things done. Then you will not only improve yourself but others will begin to see as deserving of the things you are working hard for.

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THE PING THAT STOLE MY FOCUS

It was 5 pm. I had about 14 hours to write my final paper and then be done with classes for the summer. Of course, like any college freshman, I had waited until the last minute to get started. I had plenty of time, though. It only had to be seven pages, and my roommate was already done with classes and gone for a week. There was nothing to distract me, so I wasn't panicking or worried about it.

I sat down and opened up a blank document. Then I headed into class files to review the requirements one more time before I got started.

First, I need to check my email. I was waiting for a response from another professor about an extra credit assignment. I see my mom sent me something. I'll just check it really quickly. She always sends little motivation articles, and that might help me get focused on my paper. I should send her a quick response to let her know that I got it.

"Ok. Now to get started," I tell myself.

But I hear a ping from my phone and see that my best friend has left a comment on my Facebook page. I get sucked into the social media black hole. For the next 20 minutes, I am mindlessly scrolling the newsfeed completely unaware that I am even doing it. Only when I see a post from a classmate of mine that shows him smiling from ear to ear because he finished his last paper do I remember I still haven't started

mine.

I put my phone down and turn back to my computer. I start doing some research and see that my email tab is showing I have a new message. I quickly check it, my phone pings again, and this horrific cycle repeats at least another half dozen times.

When I finally get back to researching, I think to myself that I need a break. I should go grab another coffee from the corner store on campus. I look at the clock, and it is now 10 pm.

I look at how much I have written, and all that is on the top of the page is *How Social Media Marketing Can Increase Profits For Small Business Owners*.

The title. How is it possible that all I still have is the title?

"I still have plenty of time," I try to convince myself, calmly. I will just make a coffee run, and then I will come back and work without distractions. When I get back it is close to midnight.

My phone pings again, and the panic begins to set in. I have less than seven hours now! I am not going to finish on time. I will have to just turn in whatever I possibly get completed, which turns out to only be about five pages. When I get my final grades for the term, I don't even want to see; I know I've failed and will have to retake the course if I want to graduate. Talk about a waste of money, and a waste of time.

MORAL OF THE STORY

Being unaware of how much unnecessary time is spent on emailing and social media is going to steal time away from work that needs to be done. Being interrupted by these activities will make it seem like we are busy when we are making no progress on the work that needs our attention.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHECKING YOUR EMAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA:

It interferes with your focus.

Each time you interrupt your workflow, it will take you at least 25 minutes to regain your focus according to a study conducted at The University of California (Sullivan, Thompson 2013). Nelson social media reports indicate we spend up to 3 hours a day on social platforms (Casey, 2017). Adobe research shows we can spend close to five hours a day sifting through personal and work emails (Hess, 2019). That's up to eight hours or more on these accounts and adds up to a lot of wasted time.

The goldfish effect takes over.

Our attention span is very short lasting—only about 8 seconds. This is even shorter than a goldfish, which gets distracted after 9 seconds (Bradbury, 2016). Just doing a quick check-in of emails or social media can result in us getting completely swept away by thousands of ads, posts, comments, responses, and more. After a few minutes of this bouncing around on distractions, we completely forget what we were doing or planning to do in the first place.

You become obsessed with it.

You make one innocent post or leave one comment, and soon you have ten other comments you need to respond to or feel you need to see what your friends have posted that day. We easily become engulfed in trying to stay in the loop with everyone else. It becomes an addiction that, if we ignore it, causes serious anxiety.

HOW TO GET RID OF THIS HABIT:

Step 1: Silence notifications on your phone, computer, and any other devices.

If it beeps, chimes, or vibrates, it is going to tempt you away from your work. Turn off all notifications on your computer and mobile phone. You can even set your phone so that it won't even light up when a notification is received. Use your "do not disturb" setting or set it to airplane mode.

Step 2: Stick to a schedule for checking your emails.

To be our most productive, we need to limit the number of times where we are checking our email and spend less time doing it. You might not be able to jump straight into only checking your email twice a day, but you want to at least reduce it down to three or four. Keep the times you check-in consistent each day. When it isn't those dedicated times, keep email tabs off your screen. If you have been a quick responder with your emails, others will likely have a more difficult time with your new system than you will. Rest assured, when you are consistent with the changes, they will become accustomed to them as though it was the way you have always done things. Make it known to those who are expecting a speedy response that you will only be responding to emails during your set times.

You can streamline your email by having an organized system when it is time to check. Use labels and folders that will allow you to quickly find the most important emails to address and avoid those you don't need to open. Immediately respond to emails that will only take a few minutes of your time. Move other emails that require more thought and attention to a later scheduled email time that day. Then take the time in between to draft a response so it is ready to send out when you check back in.

Step 3: Distance yourself from your devices.

If your phone isn't in arm's reach, you aren't going to be checking it for messages or alerts, and you won't be tempted to look at it. We check our email at least 36 times a day and waste an average of at least 3 hours a day on social media because our phones make it easier than ever to access these accounts. Over 90% of social media activity is done via smartphones (Mohsin, 2020). Making it more inconvenient to access your phone will limit the time you spend on wasteful activities.

Step 4: Use apps that block social media and email accounts.

When you need to be online to complete work, this makes it harder to resist checking your email or social media randomly. Apps like *Freedom* block access to the most popular social media platforms as well as Gmail and video streaming sites like Netflix. Amazon can also be blocked if you tend to get distracted by the daily deals. Browser extensions like *WasteNoTime* not only block access to multiple websites, but it tracks the time you are spending online. This will allow you to easily identify where you are wasting your time so you can better manage it.

Step 5: Immerse yourself in something more interesting and productive.

Browsing online and checking email is a habit that you simply need to replace with another. When you begin to free up more of your time by scheduling emailing times and limiting access to social media, you are going to be more tempted to break from your new routine. Reading, exercising, meditating, or picking up a new hobby are all more productive activities that can help you grow personally and professionally.

Step 6: Set up a rewards system.

Having an incentive to avoid social browsing or excess email checking serves as motivation to keep you away from these activities. Dopamine, the feel-good hormone in the brain,

increases when we access social media, which is why we seek out using these accounts. We need to trigger this increase through other means.

If you have worked for an hour without seeing a newsfeed, then reward yourself with 15 minutes of free time, go for a walk, get a special coffee, or do another preferred activity. The longer you are able to avoid unwanted activity, ideally for the entire day, the more you can reward yourself with something bigger. This can be a new video game, trip to the spa, or some much needed quiet and relaxation time in the evening. Encouraging your new behavior with rewards will ensure you stick with the new behavior.

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MOTIVATIONAL CHANGES

Before I narrowed in on providing productivity advice to businesses, I operated a sales consultant business. I had a moderate number of clients. Many were local business owners looking for ways to break into the online market to expand their reach and boost sales.

The Pareto Principle was my go-to method for explaining where businesses should be focusing their attention to increase their profits. We would identify which clients were adding to most of the profits or which products accounted for the most sales. The problem I saw most often with my clients was that most small business owners try to be everywhere online. They exhaust themselves trying to get the products on this big chain retailer, they set up multiple online shops to get more views, and they spread themselves thin. These were fairly easy fixes. We would look over what they had already done and would quickly see where a majority of their online sales were coming from. We would then focus the majority of their marketing budget to drive traffic to those sources.

One client I encountered had a small shop where she created funny and motivational quotes which she would then print on t-shirts and sometimes specially requested items. Her name was Sally, and she had a very eccentric personality. She had yet to enter online sales except for the occasional request for something from a friend through social media. Her business