

Technology a time waster?

By Tabitha Wells

It's hard to believe it was barely 15 years ago when going home still meant most contact with our friends, classmates, and colleagues was cut off for the evening. Unless there were phone calls exchanged or time spent on MSN messenger, our lives at home were separate from those of everyone else. We didn't know what 500 different people were doing or thinking that evening.

Now, I know very few people who do not spend most of their day on Facebook or other forms of social media. We have it on our computers and our cell phones, keeping constantly connected with everyone and everything. When we're bored, we often fall subject to endless scrolling and liking, rarely engaging beyond that tiny click of a button.

Obviously, there are definitely merits to social media. It provides an opportunity to keep in touch with, and updated on, the lives of close friends and family we may not be able to see often. For many of us, it's the one opportunity we have to socialize with other people.

But, is there a point where it becomes too much?

There are many studies out there with different results. Some will tell you Facebook and other mediums have made us less social. Others will say it has increased our socialization. Some say it is better for mental health while others say it is leading to worse states of mental health and the development of depression. There are arguments out there for both sides.

I think though, no matter which side you fall on, it's not possible to deny these online interactions are taking up more of our time and more of our worlds.

Personally, I find a constant challenge between wasting too much time on Facebook and being productive. Even going back six or seven years, before social networking became as big as it is now, I can remember how much more I actually accomplished. I rarely wasted time sitting in front of the TV, scrolling endlessly on the internet. I didn't know what everyone on my friend list was up to. The only way I binge-watched an entire show was if I managed to get hold of the DVD seasons of it.

I wrote every day, blogged every day, and read dozens of blogs every week, all the while keeping up with my day-to-day tasks. I never struggled to find time to exercise, clean up my room/apartment, or set aside time for a Bible study. If I stayed up late, it was because I decided to watch a movie or play some video games, not because I accidentally spent an hour lost in the vortex of Facebook.

A big part of me feels like the reason Facebook has become such a time-suck for so many of us is this buried need to be in the know. We constantly want to know what is going on around us and, in a way, seeing what everyone else is up to helps us to feel more connected to them.

For people like myself, where the majority of our friendships are lived out through contact on social media, I think it's an easier thing to succumb to. There are many reasons why some of us cultivate deeper relationships with people online rather than in real life, and while those relationships are just as powerful, they can often pull us away from our own lives here in the present.

But perhaps, it's not just social media to blame, but the advancement of the technology all around us. How many people do you know who aren't big on social media yet still manage to stay glued to their phones all the time? Whether it's texting people who aren't currently with them or constantly playing games, their devices rarely leave their hands.

With the ability to stream so many shows and movies now instead of waiting week-to-week for episodes to come out on cable, I feel like it's so much easier to cave and watch TV every night now too.

We waste endless hours doing things with little to no actual impact on our lives or the lives of others. Anything we may actually learn from these things is minimal while personal growth is even less so. Relationships are just as easily destroyed as they are built because of these. People forget how to connect in person because they're so used to connecting via a screen.

Lately, as I've pondered the impact of all of these things on my own life and the drain they've created on my productivity, I've wondered if the thing that is holding me back from pursuing my dreams is myself. Myself, that is, addicted to these technologies tying up my life.

The easiest way to find out is by simply removing the very things taking up my time. deleting Facebook, Netflix, and Twitter from my phone, disconnecting email, and refusing to log into my accounts when I am on the internet.

It's time to answer this question once and for all. Because really, if productivity doesn't increase when we cut these things out, I guess the real answer could be that humans are just plain lazy. We'll never know until we see what life is like without them. Kind of like cutting out foods to see what you're allergic too.

Whether or not it turns out technology is to blame, I think it's safe to say we could all afford to take a break from our screens every now and again.