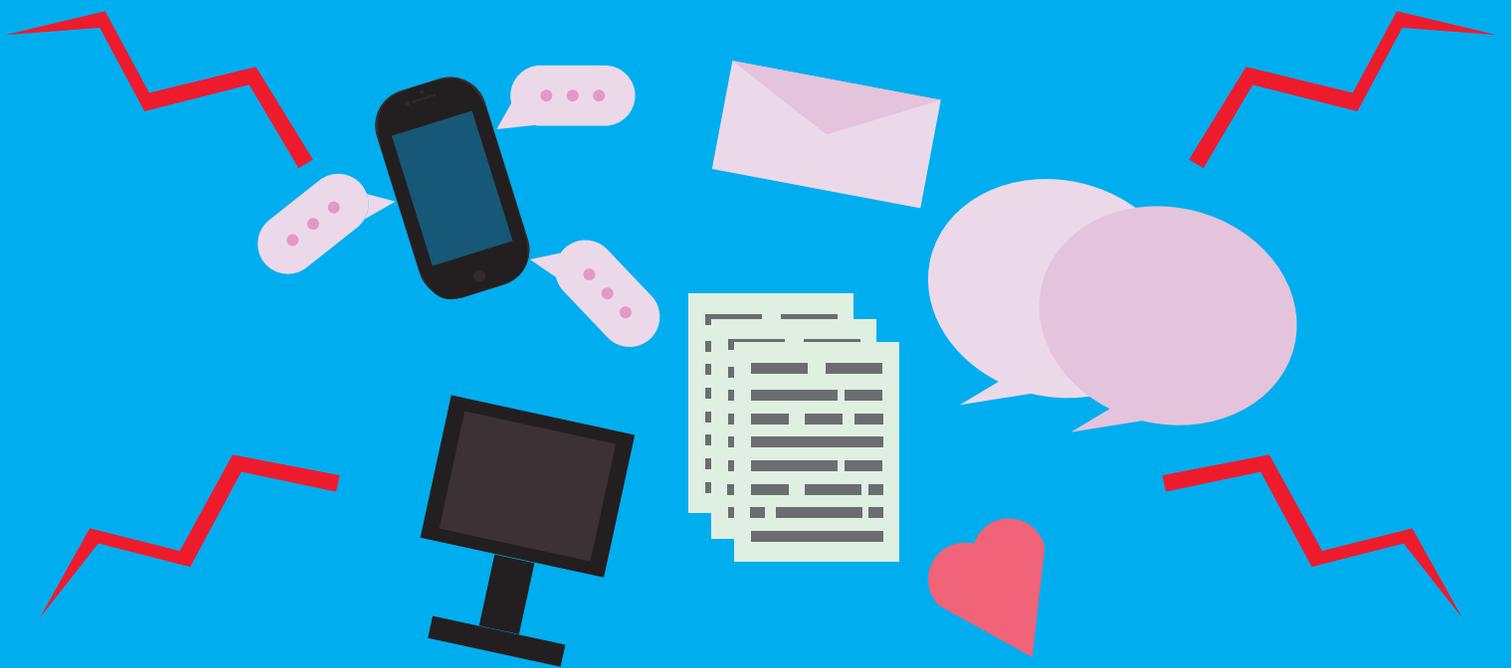


Distracted Design

why it's a problem and why you need to fix it



Executive Summary

In the world we live in, distraction is everywhere. It feels like you can't go 10 minutes without some new distraction entering your life. This continuous distraction has begun to bleed into many people's work life as well. Things like open offices and instant messaging are commonplace at many workplaces today, despite how much they actually hamper your work. This is bad for most careers, but it's especially bad in regard to design.

Design is a process that has many steps and takes a large amount of time and focus. By adding in the constant distractions prominent in today's work environment, it makes a good, meaningful design seem almost impossible. The simple solution would be to pull away from these distractions, but that in itself is extremely difficult. These smartphones are addicting and it's hard to pull away from them. It's nearly as simple as just stopping, you need a process to slowly ween yourself off it.

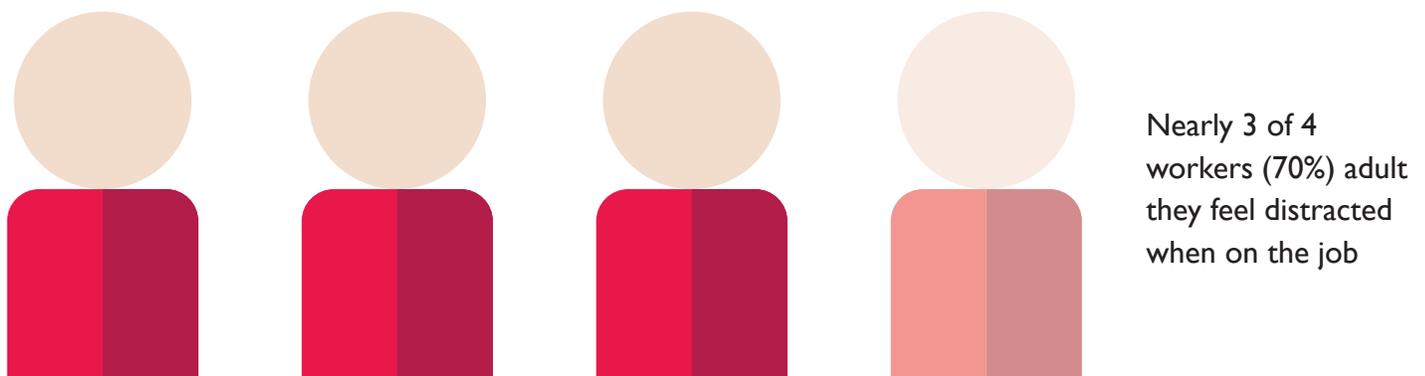
Beyond the smartphone, it's important to understand your distractions. You need to know what is killing your focus and how. By understanding this, it makes it easier to eliminate said distractions. By eliminating these distractions, not only will your design work improve, but the mental and physical benefits to a less distracted life will slowly bleed into other aspects of your life, creating a cycle of positive reinforcement that continuously grows.

The Problem

Distractions are ruining designer's focus, making deep work an impossibility. Design has an innate requirement for deep work due to the time consuming and intricate process it requires. If you aren't able to get deep, your designs will often be stuck in design hell as you can't use your mind to its full capabilities.

Much of these distractions are due to devices like the smartphone. A Umedy in depth workplace distraction report shows that nearly 3 in 4 workers admit to feeling distracted while on the job. In that same report, nearly 90% of workers admitted to some kind of social media being the cause of this distraction. Beyond the smartphone, there's also the problem of people not understanding a good design takes time. Many contractors tell their designers to finish projects in unreasonable time spans, incentivizing shallow work that often comes off as soulless. As Vevek Karthikeyan of UX Design CC notes "Time creates questions and questions create solutions and the solutions shape up your product".

Designers of all kinds are affected by this lack of deep work. Whether your designing a company's website, a poster for a new movie, or the next hit phone app, deep work is a necessity. With these ever-growing distractions in the world, it makes all designers at risk of not being able to perform deep work. A world without deep work in design is a world without great design. Some of the best modern innovations, such as the computer or even smartphone, required deep work and a long, detailed process. If we continue to let distractions get the better of us, we won't be able to perform this type of deep work. If we can't do that, it's difficult to imagine how we'd get a creation quite as innovative as something like a smartphone.

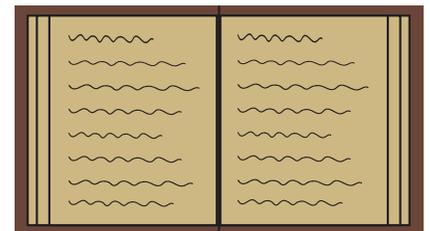
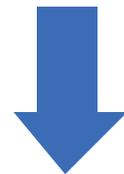


Source: Umedy In Depth: 2018 Workplace Distraction Report

Evolution of distraction

As humans, we can get easily distracted. There's a neurological/evolutionary meaning for this, as stated by psychologist and researcher Beatriz Arantes. "From a survival point of view, it was important to be attentive to your environment as there could be something that's an opportunity or a threat." Back when our main concerns were that our environment was safe, this made sense. As we have grown though, this distraction has evolved into a desire to continuously obtain something, **information**.

We crave information in almost any facet and have made many inventions to help retain, spread, and gain more information. It started small with the invention of alphabet and transcript, as we now had a way to keep track of all this information. These ideas eventually expanded to the Gutenberg printing press, allowing us to mass produce books full of information. We then kept advancing our technology further and further until we reached to where we are now, what some call the information age. Nowadays, nearly any piece of information we desire is now in the palm of our hand. It's so easy every time you have a question to pull out your phone and google it. Due to our natural inclination for distraction though, these developments have unfortunately led us to where we now feel like we can't **NOT** be distracted.



Fighting your distractions

To implement deep work into your designing requires more than a simple solution. It requires yourself to evaluate what is causing you the most distractions and how can you eliminate them. Once you're able to figure out what's hampering your work the most, it will be easier to fix.

- **Workspace:** Your workspace should be sacred to you. It should void of any potential distractions such as smartphones and unnecessary papers. All that is needed is your ideal environment and the bare minimum of what you need to create whatever step of your design you're on. This will prevent any potential distractions from leaking into your deep work period
- **Headspace:** If people will be concerned that you aren't responding quickly, let them know beforehand you're going to do some deep work. Taking breaks will also be greatly beneficial. Despite what it may seem like sometimes, deep work doesn't mean keep going till your hands fall off, it means having complete focus on your work for small chunks of time. A pattern such as Deep Work for 90 minutes, break for 30, deep work for 90, and so on and so forth will not only help you produce great work, it will also end up reducing stress and anxiety.
- **Finding a meaning:** When your design means something to you, this meaning will give you motivation and this motivation will increase your productivity and reduce your distractions. Motivation in itself is extremely valuable for any worker. As stated by UNC Executive Development director Kimberly Schaufenbuel "motivated employees handle uncertainty more easily; are better problem-solvers; have higher levels of innovation, creativity, and customer-centricity; are more profitable; create higher levels of customer satisfaction; and increase employee retention rates."

Finding your motivation

Finding your exact motivation can be difficult. Everyone is motivated by different things, whether that be loved ones, success, or monetary value. From a psychological standpoint, motivation can be separated into two categories. One category would be labeled “Intrinsic Motivation” while the other is labeled “extrinsic motivation”.



- **Intrinsic Motivation:** This can be described as the motivation that comes from within. External factors aren't important in this regard, simply performing the work is enough motivation. As described by 1&1 Ion's productivity startup guide “Intrinsic motivation is in the execution of the action itself”. Workers such as these are often motivated by things such as their expectation of their own success, curiosity of how the product may advance and develop, and positive attitudes toward their own work guiding them.

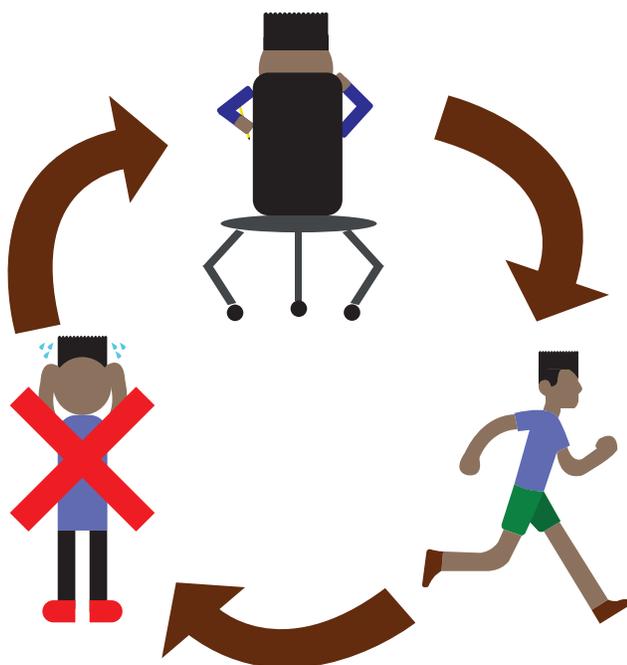


- **Extrinsic Motivation:** This type of motivation is often influenced by external incentives to perform their work. This includes things such monetary gain, compliments from their superior, or a pleased consumer. Differing from intrinsic, this form of motivation can be influenced by superiors. This can mean either positive reinforcement, or negative reinforcement. Both types have their place, but as again described by 1&1 Ion's productivity startup guide “Negative reinforcement should only be used in cases of misconduct”.

Benefits beyond just a surface level

By being able to adopt deep work into your design, the benefits you get almost seem endless. On a surface level, your work will greatly improve. When you're working deep, you'll be much more focused on those small details that take the project your working on to the next level. You'll also have a much greater chance at putting in those ideas that seemed like pipedreams before. Since your work efficiency has improved so much, you'll be getting work done faster allowing you to implement that crazy complex feature that takes days upon days to complete.

Beyond your work simply improving, the mental benefits will also be extreme. Firstly, you'll remove a large amount of stress in your life, much of which is often linked to mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression. Now you won't be scrambling last minute to try to put everything together. Instead you'll be done with the project by the due date and may even have a little extra free time depending on how efficient you are. It can even be viewed as a positive cycle effect that keeps improving. You start gaining a deep work habit and your stress will decrease. With this decreased stress you'll have more energy, allowing you to do things such as exercise and the like, improving your physical health. This new and improved physical help and lack of stress will also reduce things such as irritability, anxiety and energy drain. This healthier mindset will soon bleed back into your work, improving your intuition, creativity, and positive thinking.



The exponential growth this lack of stress gives can be life changing

Dedication is key

The key to deep work is that it's an ever-evolving process. You don't simply plop yourself in front of your computer and suddenly your work is doing itself. It takes time, effort, and the desire to maximize your work to its greatest potential. If you've never truly done deep work before, you shouldn't go straight into big, 4-hour long work sessions. That'd be like if a person who's never ran before to started off with a 4K. You should start at something like 20 minutes of deep work, then increase by 5-10 minutes each day until you feel you're at a good timespan.

Another thing about deep work is that it requires a great amount of dedication. Many of us were raised with smartphones, raised in what some call the distraction area. This means our minds are still prone to distraction, even if we've been accomplishing deep work for some time. Being able to stay committed to your deep work routine is essential, as commitment to anything is greatly beneficial, especially work. For example, as Neil Kokemuller wrote when discussing the effects of team commitment "Committed employees make decisions that benefit their colleagues, team and organization". At times it can feel too easy to slip back into your bad habits, but if you can retain your commitment and follow through on it, your work will improve exponentially.

10.3

Average age kids get their first smartphone

31%

Percentage of kids who text their parents while in the house together

22%

Increase of kids have access to the Internet via their own laptop or tablet since 2012

50%

Percentage of kids who have social media accounts by age 12

Fully Committing

If you want to start performing deep work and making your designs the best they can be, you need to be fully committed to the deep work mindset. You can't do it half-heartedly and expect results. You need to dedicate yourself to maximizing your work. This means doing things like heavily limiting your social media or just getting rid of it, giving your self sanctions from your ever-addicting smartphone and the like, and making sure you're creating something you're invested in and care about

Design is time consuming, difficult and stressful. To succeed in it requires you to put in a lot of effort and stay dedicated. Unfortunately, you'll often deal with things out of your control such as unreasonable deadlines and bad co-workers. Sometimes it seems like your mind runs blank at the worst time. There's just so many things out of your control, but there is one thing you do have control of, yourself. Only you know your biggest distractions and only you can change them. By gaining control of your distractions and removing them, you can create deep work, work that you feel is truly meaningful.

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