Take it Offline: How to break your online habit (and why you should)

Today, **through the magic of global technology, we can connect online from wherever we are in the world. Yet growing public health concerns about the state of our mental health suggest that, while we may be more connected than ever before, it's not to each other.**

In this guide we explore how, despite all its advantages, technology is harming us as individuals, is harming business and is harming society as a whole – with potentially long-lasting effects. We also offer some practical advice on how you can break your own online habit and live in a healthier, more rewarding and humane world.

miticom®

"In our endless pursuit of technology, will we ultimately decry the need and purpose of being human? Will we fail in our duty to ourselves as a species?"

**Miti Ampoma,
Founder and Director, Miticom**

62% of all adults rising to 78% among those aged 25-34 said they could not live without their mobile phone.

Source: Ofcom, Communications Market Report, August 2018; data from TouchPoints research.

Miticom is a team of communication and influence specialists. We're on a mission to change business for the greater good.

Our vision is to create a world full of game-changing communicators who lead financially and ethically successful businesses. And who lead a movement that will put the soul back into business communication.

When you communicate in a way that connects you to others, what we at **Miticom** call **Innovative Communication**, you:

» Make eye contact

» Use body language

» Listen

» Pause and reflect

» Engage your emotions

» Share an experience

» Create opportunities

» Learn from each other

» Use tone of voice and other non-verbal signs to help others understand how you feel and what you mean

All this helps create trust. That you've taken the time and trouble to speak to someone in person shows you value both them and the discussion you're having.

Don't underestimate the value of small talk either. These extra chats are often the most revealing and useful exchanges and the times when you are most likely to connect on a personal level.

Contrast this with the way we usually communicate now, in particular when we're at work:

» Quickly

» In isolation

» Behind the barrier of a screen

» With no non-verbal clues and cues

» From our own perspective, with no context

» In an environment and from a device where we can easily be distracted

This means you have no way to understand what the other person really means and how they are feeling, other than through the words on the screen. You can't connect with them on a personal level and you can't see how they react to your message. It's impersonal. And strong, productive, human relationships are not built from what's impersonal.

Because we're human beings, which means we're relational. We have a fundamental need to make genuine connections with other people. We need to feel valued, rewarded and inspired by our conversations with others.

Yet too often, the way we communicate today prevents us from making these genuine human connections. It prevents us from being human.

How our online habit is affecting us as individuals

We're addicted to the internet. And we're addicted to our mobile phones.

The following statistics should shock you:

» 40% of adults look at their phone within five minutes of waking up.

» 37% check it five minutes before going to sleep.

» For those under 35 these figures increase to 65% and 60% respectively.

» And once we're awake we check our smartphones every 12 minutes throughout the day.

» On average, an adult in the UK will spend 2 hours and 28 minutes online on their smartphone every day. For those aged 18-24 this rises to 3 hours and 14 minutes a day. And for women in this age group it rises even further to 3 hours 40 minutes a day.

» And 71% of adults say they never turn off their phone.

If this is you, it means you're constantly 'switched on', ready and waiting for the next interruption.

We don't talk like we used to.

Our growing use of the internet and online messaging services has changed the way we communicate. The rise in the

Average time online on our smartphones

EVERY WEEK

All adults	17hrs 16mins
Adults aged 18-24	22hrs 38mins
Women aged 18-24	25hrs 40mins

EVERY MONTH

All adults	2 days 21hrs
Adults aged 18-24	3 days 18hrs
Women aged 18-24	4 days 6hrs

EVERY YEAR

All adults	34.50 days
Adults aged 18-24	45.25 days
Women aged 18-24	51.33 days

number of internet-based messaging services and our almost universal access to the internet means we now make far fewer voice calls. We're speaking to each other in person less and less and instead relying on a series of short messages to share information and keep in touch. This means we're in danger of losing the meaningful connections we make through a phone conversation. And we're even harming our relationships when we're with people in person.

We can see this because, although 74% of adults say better access to the internet keeps them close to their friends and family, 54% also say connected devices interrupt their face-to-face conversations.

We're distracted

Our addiction to being online is also making us less able to give our full attention to one thing. For example, 53% of adults say they are usually on their phone while watching TV with others.

We can't even make a simple journey without getting out our phones. 63% of people admit to using a smartphone while walking down the street – a behaviour most of us find unacceptable in others yet continue to do ourselves.

And seven in ten commuters use their smartphone on their journey, 35% of these to start work before they've even made it into the office.

This all begs two key questions: In these constantly connected and distracted times, when do we live in the moment with our focus on the people we are with or the environment around us?

And what impact do our individual actions have on business and on society as a whole?

Source: All data from Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2018.

10 signs it's time for you to come offline

TOP TEN SIGNS

1. You're on your phone last thing at night and first thing in the morning

2. If you wake in the night you check your phone

3. You look at your phone when you walk down the street

4. You interrupt whatever you're doing to answer calls or check notifications

5. Your phone is always in your hand, never in your pocket or your bag

6. You keep your phone on your desk at work

7. You feel panicky if you don't have your phone with you

8. You constantly check where your phone is, for example if it's still in your pocket

9. If you're standing waiting or you're in a queue, you're on your phone

10. You can't remember the last time you had a proper face-to-face conversation, other than when you were in a meeting at work

How our online habit is affecting business

"The bedrock of a great business is based on human capital and that capital is built on human relationships. Human relationships depend on genuine, effective communication"

Miti Ampoma

Advances in online technology are helping businesses develop and grow in ways few of us could have imagined. But they've also created new problems that businesses must deal with if they are to survive.

Perhaps the most critical of these problems is communication. Effective communication plays a key role in the success of a business, both in terms of its finances and corporate social responsibility. Yet it is often overlooked and undervalued.

Today we can choose from an overwhelming number of online communication tools. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, communication at work still breaks down. When it does, it creates stress for staff and slows business productivity and growth.

Responding to a survey of senior executives, managers and junior staff by The Economist Intelligence Unit, 88% of

86% of people said a breakdown in communication with colleagues can hurt the bottom line

Yet only **49%** felt technology would help prevent these breakdowns

71% of people surveyed said **more face-to-face meetings would have a significant impact** on improving communication between colleagues

88% of people surveyed said **face-to-face communication is an effective way** to help them share information and understand it well
Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit report, Communication barriers in the modern workplace, 2018.

According to Forbes, some office workers receive **more than 200 emails a day**. They spend around **2½ hours a day** reading and replying to these emails.

people said poor communication had added to their stress at work – with 26% saying this happened very often.

56% of people said they spent a few hours each week working to resolve problems caused by poor communication. And 44% said poor communication had caused projects to be delayed or even to fail completely.

How we communicate at work

At work we are subject to, and responsible for, an almost constant barrage of information. Yet how often do we stop and think about the best way to share the information we wish to communicate?

Although 60% of people responding to The Economist survey said they communicate by email at work every day – making it the most often used method of communication – only 40% considered it to be a very effective way to communicate. By contrast, 65% of people said face-to-face meetings are a very effective way to communicate. Yet only 22% said they have face-to-face meetings every day.

And 42% of respondents said communication broke down because of the different ways people prefer to communicate, depending on their age.

If they are to lead successful businesses, leaders must be able to communicate effectively using a wide range of communication tools. This includes online tools. And, crucially, it includes the ability to communicate clearly in person.

Communication styles by generation

	Personal Focus on relationships	Functional Focus on process
Millennials (born 1981-1999)	23%	33%
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	34%	15%
Baby Boomers (born 1964)	39%	21%

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit report, Communication barriers in the modern workplace, 2018.
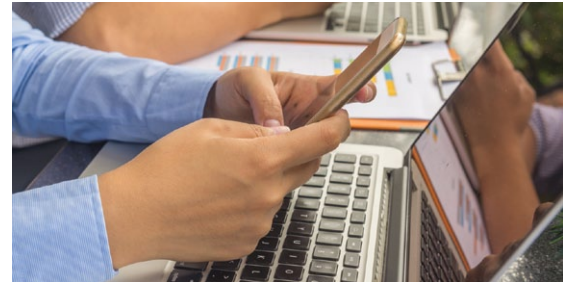
Four quick and easy ways to break your online habit at work – and help your colleagues in the process

1. If you want to receive fewer emails and messages start by sending fewer. Don't copy people in if they don't need to have the information. And don't be afraid to simply delete emails and messages you've been sent but don't need to reply to.

2. Pick up the phone and talk to people in person or, better still, meet them face-to-face. Of course, there will be times when email or online messages are the best way for you to communicate and that's fine. We're not saying never use them, but don't make them your default way to communicate.

3. Only read and reply to your emails and online messages at set times in the day. The rest of the time turn off your notifications.

4. Put your smartphone away when you're at work. A survey by Deloitte found that 64% of people were distracted by their smartphone when they were at work.

How our online habit is affecting society

The affects our online habits have on us as individuals, on business and on society as a whole cannot be separated. Each has an impact on the other.
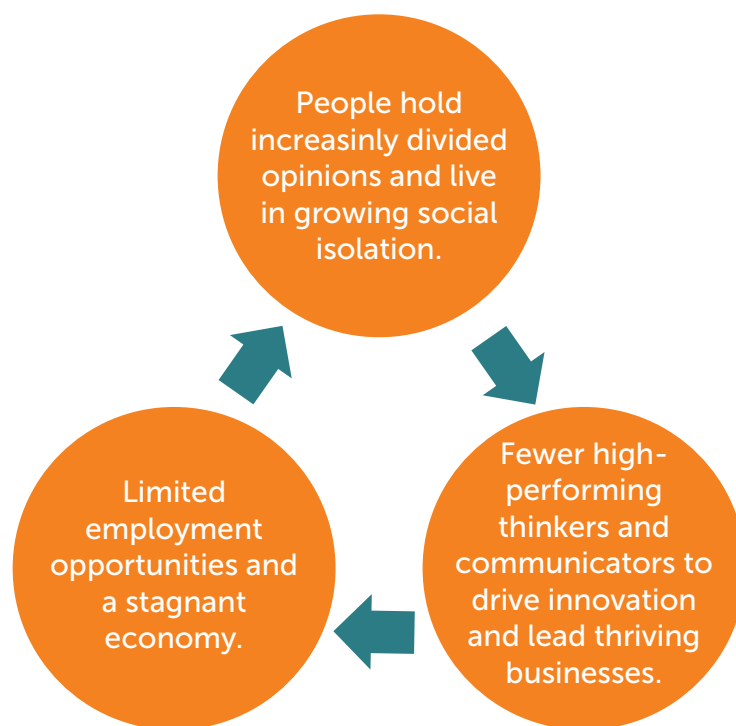
According to the Mental Health Foundation, we're reporting record numbers of mental ill-health, isolation and loneliness. Some of this increase is because we're more willing to admit to and report mental health problems. But it's also clear our online addiction is taking its toll.

In 2018, the American Pew Research Centre asked leading US academics, engineers, research scientists and writers about the impact digital technology is having on our well-being. Their responses suggest our online addiction is harming our:

» Focus
» Memory
» Creativity
» Judgement
» Critical thinking
» Mental resilience

They also suggest we're becoming more socially isolated and our interpersonal relationships are not as strong.

When we don't have a strong network of support from our friends and family, it's harder for us to cope when we're under stress. This includes when we're struggling to cope at work.

People hold increasingly divided opinions and live in growing social isolation.

Fewer high-performing thinkers and communicators to drive innovation and lead thriving businesses.

Limited employment opportunities and a stagnant economy.

The cost for business

In 2015, mental health problems, including anxiety, depression and stress, were the third most important cause of sick leave in the UK leading to approximately **17.6 million days of absence**. *Source: The Mental Health Foundation.*

In 2017, the Stevenson / Farmer review on mental health and work revealed the costs of mental health to the UK economy as a whole are between **£74 billion and £99 billion per year**. Further analysis by Deloitte shows the cost to employers is between **£33 billion and £42 billion per year.**

"All in all, digital life is now threatening our psychological, economic and political well-being."

Rob Reich, Professor of Political Science, Stanford University

There are obvious benefits to how the internet is changing how and where we work. Indeed, 41% of people say being online allows them to work more flexibly. But 15% say it makes them feel as if they are always at work. *Source: Ofcom, Communications Market Report 2018*

We're not machines, we're people. We're not designed to work without stopping. For us to function at our best we need time to rest and clear our minds. When we do, we're more creative, more productive and more engaged.

What our online habit means for society in the long term

As the responses to the Pew Research Centre's report suggests, we're losing our ability to concentrate. Yet the greatest innovations come from focus and uninterrupted thought. This is hard to achieve when we're constantly bombarded with information and have no real way to control it – other than to come offline of course.

Another effect of our online addiction is that we're losing our ability to prioritize. The immediacy of the way we communicate online means everything appears to matter. But how do we then know what matters most?

And, most worryingly, we're becoming more and more divided, each side entrenched in its own point of view. Because our online feeds are designed to give us more of the information we've consumed before, we're not hearing a wider story. We're not listening to and learning from each other.

Think of all those panel shows and radio phone-ins when everyone shouts over each other without hearing what anyone else is saying. Or scroll through a few online exchanges and see how our tone is increasingly outraged and polarised.

To protect ourselves, our businesses and our society, it's time to act.

As founder of the World Wide Web **Sir Tim Berners-Lee** said when he launched the World Wide Web Foundation's (the organisation he set up to advance the open web as a public good and a basic right) new Contract for the Web:

It's time for us all to play our role to make sure "the web serves all of humanity", rather than harms it.

How to spot you've got a problem

Do you know many online apps are as addictive as cigarettes, alcohol and sugar? This is a deliberate part of their design so that you stay online for as long as possible.

Find out if your online habit is getting out of control by seeing how many of the signs below relate to you.

12 warning signs it's time for you to take it offline

TOP 12 SIGNS

1. You struggle to get off to sleep and when you do your sleep is disturbed

2. You think it's more important to check what comes up on your phone than to keep talking to the person you're with

3. You think it's more important to check what comes up on your phone than to stay focussed on what you're already doing

4. You ignore your family and friends when you're on your phone

5. You feel dissatisfied with your life after comparing it to what you see online

6. You can't concentrate on one thing at a time

7. You can't remember the last time you read a book from cover to cover

8. You've stopped listening to other people when they talk

9. You have pain in your neck or arm from constantly holding and looking at your phone

10. You can't sit still and be in the moment unless you have your phone in your hand

11. You frequently lose track of time

12. You struggle to prioritize and complete routine tasks

11 top tips for how to break your online habit...

And live in a more connected, rewarding and humane world.

1. Turn off your notifications, or at least some of them.

2. Try coming offline every day – even if it's just for half an hour. Gradually build up the time you're offline until you can happily spend an afternoon, or even a whole day, without constantly checking your phone.

3. Challenge yourself to keep your phone in your pocket when you're walking to the shops or to work. Gradually build up the time you can be out without checking your phone. It's like building up an underused muscle: the more you do it the easier it will become. And the more you'll notice what's going on around you.

4. Don't rely on texts and instant messages to keep in touch with your friends and family. Call them on the phone instead. You'll be able to hear their voice and enjoy a proper conversation.

5. Don't just email or message your colleagues, get up and go and see them. If this isn't possible, use a video conferencing tool so you can see and hear them in person.

6. If you watch television, leave your phone in another room. Focus on the programme you're watching and save the online conversations about it for after it's finished.

7. Try reading something printed. Something that gives you information you can learn from and use and so requires more concentration than a series of clickbait headlines.

8. Don't use your tablet or computer to watch television in bed. Use the time before sleep to read, or do something else that doesn't require the internet!

9. Get an alarm clock so you don't have an excuse to keep your phone in your bedroom.

10. Take up an activity that will help you focus on being in the moment, like yoga, Pilates or meditation.

11. Go outside more and connect with the natural world. Go for walks in the park or the countryside, feed the birds or grow something, even if it's just a herb in a pot on your windowsill.

Miticom: what we do

We work with business leaders, managers and next-generation leaders. Through our programmes and workshops we can help you develop the advanced communication skills you need to create and maintain a successful global business in our complex and fast-changing world. A world that's increasingly driven by process and technology.

We can help you use your communication skills to lead with confidence and enjoy sustainable growth, performance and profitability. We call this innovative communication. Its roots are in integrity and humanity. Its purpose is to put people back where they belong — at the heart of every successful business.

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