

7 tips to dealing with tech addiction in the workplace

Unless you're a Luddite, you won't have failed to appreciate how tech has transformed the workscape. While offices were once a sea of paperwork, travel expense slips, fax machines, mobile phones the size of bricks, typewriters - you get the gist - the evolution of modern technology has consigned them all to history. Now that we have high-speed internet, smartphones, IP telephony like Skype, social networking sites, chat apps and cloud computing, the 21st-century work environment has been totally reshaped. With the touch of a button, distances have become immaterial and communication instantaneous. Knowledge is now shared freely, and things just get done faster.



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Hand in hand with these technological advances comes a new workforce: an ever-expanding pool of digital nomads who are used to plugging in anywhere, at any time – a dynamic bunch who eschew the constraints of working from one set place and doing the standard 9-5. So far, so good. But let's remove the blinkers: while mobile technology may have allowed us to move beyond the four walls of the traditional office, allowing us to work on the go, this digital revolution does not come without its downsides.

Taking it too far

There's a thin line between utilising technology so it's beneficial, and taking it too far. Sadly, a growing number of people are overstepping it: so much so, we're always looking at our emails, chatting on WhatsApp and communicating via social media. Indeed, a 2017 [UK study from Ofcom](#) found that 34% of people surveyed had checked Facebook in the past 10 minutes. In short, we're addicted to tech – and it's eroding our time and attention, particularly in the workplace. Every time our smartphone buzzes or our laptop pings, we get distracted. If our line of thought is interrupted, it takes a while to get back on track. Precious time (and productivity), lost.

But the misuse of tech can do more than compromise productivity, it can impact our mental wellbeing. The new 'always-on' culture is blurring the distinction between work and life. According to an [IDC report](#), 80% of smartphone users say that checking their phone is the first thing they do in the morning. We don't give ourselves a digital break and this can, according to [Deloitte Insights](#), lead to stress and anxiety, depression, poor sleep and physical disconnection.

So, while technology in the workplace is a blessing, it can also be a curse. After all, what business wants a preoccupied, ineffective, stressed-out employee? Luckily, there are ways to a more balanced approach to technology.

Global flexible workspace provider IWG plc's brand, Spaces, shares a few steps to make this possible:

Get cultured

Having the right company culture when it comes to technology goes a long way to moderating usage. A healthy tech policy with clear communication guidelines, is vital: ensure, for example, that team members are aware of when remote workers are online and when it is/isn't ok to contact them. Create awareness through talks and workshops of how overuse of devices can have detrimental effects.

Establish boundaries

Help employees understand what is expected of them, especially when it comes to working hours. Make sure there's a clear end point to their day and that you don't overstep it. Just because someone can be contacted when they're not in the office doesn't mean they need to be. Likewise, as an employee, if you're working remotely, set your hours and stick to them.

Make productivity count

If you want your workforce to understand that disconnecting is ok, put emphasis on productivity rather than availability. Staff should not be rewarded for being at the end of a smartphone to answer the boss's email at silly o'clock; rather, they should be given credit for completing a great piece of work on schedule.

Get "Appy"

It sounds ironic, but tech can be used as a means of avoiding tech. Give employees access to screen-time apps – like Space, Freedom or Moment – which can remind them to take a break if they've been emailing or texting for long periods, curb social media use and create blocklists.

Take a break

For the office-based, introduce a daily tech-free break when all devices are unplugged. Encourage employees to use the time to gather thoughts over a coffee, catch up with a colleague or go for a distraction-free stroll. Some companies also limit or forbid staff from sending business emails after hours; even going so far as deleting any messages employees might receive on holiday.

Stick to the plan

Once you have policies in place, make sure everyone sticks to them. If managers and team leaders are constantly checking their phones 24/7, it sends out the wrong message. Those at the top should be inspiring the team to use their smartphones as a means of efficiency, not as a distraction.

Keep it real

Encourage face-to-face meetings and social interaction with colleagues. There's nothing like a group lunch or a brainstorm to foster team spirit and get the creative juices flowing. When a get-together takes place, ensure that it's a screen-free zone. If seeing people in person isn't possible, encourage employees to stay connected in real time by picking up the phone instead of sending texts or emails. Sometimes, it's good to talk.