

Divisive devices

Confessions of a cell phone addict

If asked to give up your smartphone for one day, could you do it, asks Megan Zakrzewski

HAD YOU ASKED ME three years ago, what my biggest fear was, I would have said it was flying. No, it wasn't the thought of being more 30,000 feet above sea level, it was something else. It was the moment after the plane had been boarded, the cabin door bolted shut, and the pilot would say, "Attention all passengers. For your safety and the safety of those around you, we request you to power down all cell phones and electronic devices for the duration of this flight."

Can't live without my phone

During the time my phone was off, I would feel what is sometimes referred to as the 'phantom vibrate', a false sensation that my cell phone had vibrated when it had obviously not. I longed desperately to communicate with the outside world, and after receiving the 'go-ahead' from the pilot, I would desperately power up my phone. It felt like ages, as I would anxiously wait to receive all impending text messages, emails and notifications. My pupils would dilate from excitement as the device came to life. I would immediately FaceTime with friends and family, informing them of my safe arrival in Los Angeles, update my Facebook status with a check-in at LAX and answer any work emails with the same urgency.

It's a hopeful scenario I often imagine, especially now, when I am looking to break free from our technology-driven society. Walking down a crowded city street, my eardrums are filled with the incessant sound of cell phones ringing, buzzing, chiming, whistling and whatever else we programme them to do.

As mobile devices continue to evolve, so does the need to elicit constant communication. But is the ability to effortlessly and instantly communicate with others causing more harm than good?



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Communication without expression

Scientists argue that excessive use of communications technology among the teens is leading to a lack of personal expression, which in turn will lead these 'digital natives'—a generation raised around computers—to struggle with reading body language and facial expressions as adults.

Who's to say the grown-ups aren't as much the culprit as the youngsters in this case? Most adults not only rely on tablets and mobile devices to occupy their children, they also set negative examples when it comes to inappropriate cell phone usage.

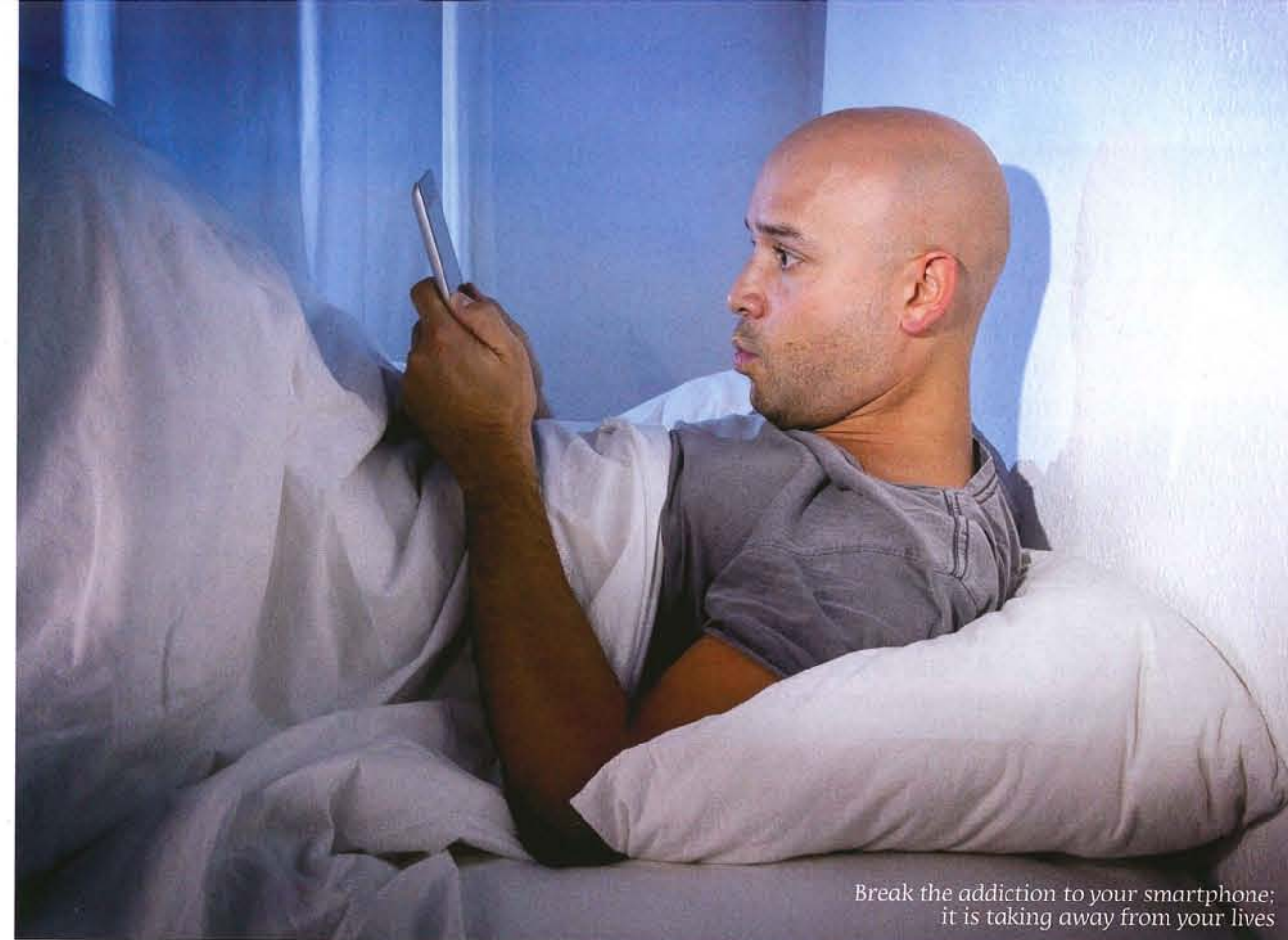
Texting while driving and while crossing the street is a growing trend that is quickly becoming one of the leading causes of death. And the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration has reported that texting can increase the likelihood of a crash by up to 23 times.

I've had my fair share of scares, and though I know the danger it presents, I still feel the urge to text my friends and even surf the Web while in motion. Over time, I've learned to keep my cell phone in the back seat and out of reach while in the car, as a means of stopping all impulses to check a text message, make a phone call or take a picture of something worth sharing. The truth is, cell phone use is a bad habit that is not only taking lives. It's taking away from our lives.

No more Candy Crush Saga

One of the greatest New Year's resolutions I ever made was in 2014. It involved deleting the Candy Crush Saga app from my phone. Addicted to playing the game, I would separate myself from social situations by refusing to participate in the conversations going on around me. I was unaware of how socially awkward I had become until one afternoon while visiting family. After being asked several times to put my cell phone down and mingle, I knew I had a problem. That evening, I uninstalled the app and have yet to reactivate it.

By the end of the following week, I began to see just how much better life without Candy Crush could be, and before long, I didn't even miss it. With this in mind, I refrain from downloading similar applications to my



Break the addiction to your smartphone; it is taking away from your lives

device today and follow several easy steps to overcoming addiction; the obvious being: leaving the phone at home.

I know you're probably thinking, "What happens if there's an emergency?" A great question and a problem I actually encountered once when I was at dinner on vacation in Washington, D.C. Not knowing that I had purposely left my phone charging in the hotel, my mother tried calling several times to tell me that my grandfather had passed. Though unfortunate to hear such news, I was lucky enough to be out with someone who had his phone on him. From then on out, I vowed to always make sure that at least one member of my party would have a phone on him or her at all times in case of an emergency.

Break off the habit

If alone and still trying to ditch the distractions, I suggest putting your phone on silent, turning off your data, or keeping it out of sight and away from your side such as in a desk drawer while at work or on the charger once home. All of these alternatives get the job done just fine when I'm looking to rid myself of senseless technology for a few minutes, a few hours or even for the entire day.

An avid concert-goer in my youth, I would

spend the majority of each performance capturing footage on my cell phone. Later on, I'd waste hours adding the blurry photos and incoherent videos to my Facebook wall. *As if anyone really cared.* Now that I am older, I leave the phone at home, live for the moment and enjoy the show. Whatever it takes to become less socially awkward. I consider myself lucky because most people deny or fail to realise they've fallen victim to this addiction.

Although work can sometimes make it impossible not to answer text messages or emails while dining out, I've witnessed entire tables of friends and families playing quietly on their phones instead of engaging in real-life conversations. We don't even think how this anti-social behaviour affects the lives of people around us.

Cell phone addiction and the destruction it can cause plague many lives today. It is our duty, both as friends and as citizens, to put a stop to it. If asked to abandon your smartphone entirely, even for a day, could you? If the answer is still a "no," hopefully you'll one day come to your senses and reconsider. Perhaps, like me, you'll find it to be one of the best decisions you've ever made.

