

Digital Addiction: Blurring the Lines of Reality

by Karel Murray, CSP, DREI

I never realized how much my ability to use my computer has taken over my life. Recently, severe storms caused a power outage that lasted for over six hours. Of course I noticed the black clouds rolling in and had partially listened to the television warnings in the other room announcing possible tornado touch downs, but I had a deadline to meet as I busily typed away on my computer. Then everything went black as high velocity winds pummeled my office windows.

My first thought was "I wonder how long my battery will last?" and not "Run for cover, we are going to die!"

The sheer inconvenience of having to remove my computer from the docking station and reboot it into life drew a frustrated curse from me "I don't need this!" That's when I looked out my office window and saw the eerily yellow and black clouds on the horizon and watched our mature maple trees bend at impossible angles as their leaves whipped about. My next thoughts were about gathering up my computers and backup batteries, cell phone, husband, pets, and flashlights.

Notice the order in which I gathered up my most precious possessions. I assumed that my husband and pets could take care of themselves, but my electronics were helpless. As we sat in the darkened house I understood emotionally how much technology has become an intricate part of our lives. I began to fantasize as to what I would do if I didn't have a computer to work with or a cell phone that I could use. I would have to watch movies from the 60's and 70's to remember what we used to do!

First and foremost, processing would slow down. Nothing would be done instantaneously – for example:

1. Instead of sending an Adobe PDF document over the Internet to a person awaiting a contract signature, I would have to deliver it by hand or put it in the mail.
2. I would have to use a pen and paper to write down my thoughts and if I'm lucky have some 3M White Out on hand to mark out my mistakes. Otherwise, I would have to either slow down and write with purpose or simply endure a messy scratched document. Where on earth would I locate a typewriter?
3. I wouldn't have Dragon Speaking software anymore where I could dictate my notes and have the computer transcribe it onto an electronic Microsoft Word® document so I didn't have to type it later.
4. I'd have to look outside to check the weather rather than accessing www.weather.com before dressing for the day in the appropriate clothing.

5. Pulling into a gas station and asking for directions would become a common occurrence rather than looking at my Tom Tom Global Positioning System or my iPhone® App for directions.
6. I would need to access the Yellow Pages Book to find a place to eat rather than access my iPhone® App "Around Me" or "Urban Spoon" to locate a local eatery. I might even have to ask a sales clerk for a referral in terms of diners.
7. Letters would be the main mode of long distance communication and responses might take weeks depending upon the distance the note had to travel.
8. As a family, we would play games like Monopoly, Scrabble or Life on the actual board with plastic game pieces rather than individually playing on an interactive Internet application with strangers worldwide.
9. Visual recollection of an event would have to suffice because the ability to video tape would not exist and the old tradition of storytelling would find resurgence in an effort to share that memory with others.
10. When daylight faded, we would have to rely upon the flickering lamp flame to see what we are doing. The soft wavering would lull us to a gentle sleep – probably around 8:00 PM. And we would awaken either at the crow of a rooster or by the soft touch of daylight on our cheeks, not by an electric alarm clock.
11. Foods would be cooled in streams and rivers or buried below the ground in root cellars. A cold beer would be a thing of the past. A resurgence of growing our own fresh vegetables and farming individual plots of land would happen as a way to supplement our food stores.
12. Shouting across yards and over fences would be normal because texting would disappear. We might even have to walk a mile or so to actually speak with someone.
13. Relying on those who had skills to reproduce life necessities would become commonplace. Our new best friends would be the butcher, cobbler, doctor, seamstress, and cook.
14. Social networking would not take place on Facebook or Second Life. Instead, the monthly dance at the city center provides opportunities to reconnect with others face to face.
15. Our children would learn math by completing problems long hand and would use their fingers and toes to count instead of relying upon a calculator.
16. Food would be purchased in bulk from the local market proprietor because the trips to town take too long.

17. Entertainment transforms at a local level, done through group sing alongs, artists jamming with string instruments and whittled flutes and interactive story telling around a campfire or fireplace at night.
18. Research for projects would no longer be at our fingertips, but we might have to refer to the latest edition of the World Book Encyclopedia and speak with the town elders for advice and counsel.
19. Spare time (what spare time) would be a thing of the past as we work daily to try to feed and clothe ourselves as well as procure the fuel needed to keep us warm at night.
20. We'd look our age due to lack of access to plastic surgery, Botox®, hair dye and cosmetics. Oh boy.

Recognizing my digital addiction has been a good thing. I must remember that I control the technology use, it doesn't control me. In fact, I think perhaps I'll take the next few hours to handwrite some birthday greetings, darn a sock and cook a meal from scratch.

Okay, that was a good fantasy while it lasted. I can send eCards, buy a new sock for cheap, and microwave a great Mrs. Smith frozen dinner. I appreciate the past, but by God, I'm sure going to enjoy what I have now for as long as I can!



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