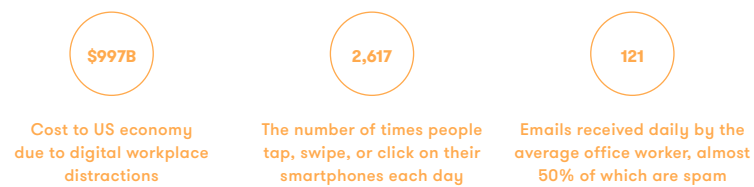


# Focus, *Interrupted*

## The Reality of Digital Distractions



Minutes spent working before the average employee switches tasks

We all want to feel buoyed by creative flow, that elusive sweet spot where distractions and self-criticism melt away. It's a mode for hyper-productivity and innovation, a stress zapper without the infomercial. And considering the millions of office distractions, a precious resource for today's worker.

We're at the point where work is getting done in the margins. In a meeting about next quarter's KPIs, half of the participants are hurrying to finish last-minute projects, listening just enough to respond if need be. Multitasking, once the sign of a high-achiever, now leads to piles of half-completed tasks.

A respected expert on the flow frame of mind, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, explains "for better or for worse, our future is now closely tied to human creativity. The result will be determined in large part by our dreams and by the struggle to make them real."

### Internal emails, social media check-ins and spontaneous chats veer a person off track an average of 23 minutes per distraction.

Struggle we do. According to the study, *The Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress*, internal emails, social media check-ins, and spontaneous chats veer a person off track an average of 23 minutes per distraction. The phrase "heads down" is thrown around a lot, though rarely practiced in full. With dozens of modes of communication, URL and IRL, keeping up feels a lot like a dog chasing its own tail: endless exercise without any sense of completion.

### Your iPhone or Android is a stimulus too potent for its own good.

The biggest culprit is one of the tiniest: the smartphone. Its mere presence calls for you to pick it up. It doesn't have to be ringing, beeping, or vibrating. Researchers have found if it's in your line of sight, then it's on your mind. They cut down on everything from split-second decision making to long-term goal setting. This goes for laptops, too. Even for those who walked into a meeting laptop-free, if one is open at the table then concentration suffers for everyone.

Your iPhone or Android is a stimulus too potent for its own good. First, its location on your desk dictates easy reach. Second, it's a tool used for all of your possible personal needs and goals. Its breadth of applications endless, you could learn of a natural disaster, check-in on potentially affected friends, and donate money to the clean-up in five minutes flat. To be fair, that's an admirable use of your distraction device, but you see the point.

Its constant stream of information torpedoes working memory capacity, a limited resource for temporarily holding information available for processing. It commands your automatic attention as a frequently relevant stimulus not associated with the task at hand. In short, a cellphone becomes a decoy for what actually needs to be accomplished. Despite best intentions, everyone's cognitive abilities only stretch so far and so efficiently.

So throw your cellphone into a desk drawer for the day. Pause your inbox. Disconnect from the hive. And find a cozy spot away from colleagues, knowing all the while, you and your job are better off for it.



Interruptions experienced daily at work