



# Reduce the distraction from the casino in your pocket

In the early days of email, one of the common bits of productivity advice was “turn off your inbox notifications.” The “You’ve Got Mail” sound or pop-up was a constant source of distraction while trying to get work done. Even with the advent of smartphones that advice was still mostly good enough. The phone meant you could check email everywhere you went, but the distraction was still limited to emails and texts from friends and clients. Jump forward to 2017, and we’re all carrying around what some call a casino in your pocket. That choice of words refers to more than just the pings, pop-ups and multi-coloured notifications from a myriad of apps that can make your phone look and sound like a Vegas slot machine. The apps mimic some of the techniques casinos use to lure customers in and get them to stay.

Some of these techniques are based on science that shows that the same pleasure/reward centres in the brain that light up for slot machine wins react in a similar way to “likes,” friend requests, message notifications and @ mentions. And just like slot machine

wins, these come at unpredictable times so you can become obsessed with watching for them. App makers are designing notifications to keep you constantly coming back for more.

And just as casinos carefully control the environment to lull you into not noticing how much time has passed and divert you away from exits, app makers want to keep you inside their site. The time spent and the ads you might see are lucrative to them. You



might think it only takes a second to check a Facebook like or Twitter mention, but once there you are tempted by news, videos, suggested contacts and a truly never-ending supply of new posts to see. Facebook itself estimates that users spend nearly an hour a day visiting its apps: more than most people spend reading, eating or exercising.<sup>1</sup>

One study has shown that the end result of all of this app surfing can be hours of lost productivity. A 2016 survey of thousands of employers and employees by Career-Builder estimates that two or more hours of work a day is lost to checking phones (the phones that 80 per cent of people surveyed say they keep within eyesight<sup>2</sup>). For a profession that revolves around the billable hour, that time can become expensive.

A problem that is less easy to measure is how phone distraction could affect the work you are doing for your client. “Poor communication” and “inadequate investigation” are two of the leading causes of malpractice claims against lawyers. We used to call it BlackBerry legal advice; missing details because of the fast and superficial nature of a quick question and reply via email. If you’re skimming your Facebook feed while on the phone with a client, or glancing at the phone while reviewing documents, your lack of focus could mean missing a key piece of information that could result in a claim later.

Obviously social media apps and smartphones are here to stay, and so is the constantly connected world they’ve created.

So what can you do to make your phone a little less distracting?

1. Change the notification settings in the individual apps. Most of the social media apps let you adjust when you receive alerts. Look for a Settings button in the app’s menu, and then click on Notifications. The exact location of these settings will vary from app to app. In Facebook you can choose whether to be notified of messages, comments, friend requests, wall posts, etc. In Twitter, you can turn on/off notifications for likes, retweets, mentions and new followers.

You will still see these when you log into the app, but you won’t get an alert from your phone every time they happen.

2. Turn off the notifications for the entire app in your phone settings. Open your Settings, click Notifications, and turn on/off notifications for every app on your phone. The process is similar on all types of phones. Most phones have a “do not disturb” function in their Settings menus, which can temporarily turn off all notifications (sounds, lights and vibrations).
3. Sometimes just seeing all those tempting looking app icons is enough to make you want to tap them to see what’s new. If you want to avoid temptation, move the icons into a separate folder or off your home screen onto a screen that requires you to swipe left or right to find them. To move app icons around, just press and hold on them and drag them to another screen or on top of another app to create a new folder. This will add one extra step to find them next time. Leave the home screen for the ‘boring’ apps like the weather, the coffee shop, or your bank! ■

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<sup>1</sup> [nytimes.com/2016/05/06/business/facebook-bends-the-rules-of-audience-engagement-to-its-advantage.html?\\_r=0](http://nytimes.com/2016/05/06/business/facebook-bends-the-rules-of-audience-engagement-to-its-advantage.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> [prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-careerbuilder-survey-reveals-how-much-smartphones-are-sapping-productivity-at-work-300281718.html](http://prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-careerbuilder-survey-reveals-how-much-smartphones-are-sapping-productivity-at-work-300281718.html)