



A different type of technology trend

Last week I logged on to view the e-edition of the Enterprise and I was instantly drawn to an iPhone graphic paired with the headline “From luxury to necessity: cell phones dominate everyday life.” Boy, did that hit home.

I once considered myself an anomaly amongst my peers because I didn’t have a cell phone until I was 18 years old. Looking around, I saw children who weren’t even in the double digits texting, so I felt positively ancient by the time I joined with AT&T family.

However, in the four short years that have passed since then, I have become just like every other technology addicted college student out there. Every day I see firsthand the technology trends discussed in the article. In line, on the bus and out to dinner people are chatting away. In classes, during conversations and even while walking people are texting and checking their e-mails.

But the addiction to 24/7 technology isn’t the only trend I’ve seen. With the rise of cell phone usage, there seems to be a similar rise in institutions challenging users to give up their technology for a period of time.

The International Center for Media and the Public Affairs recently conducted a large global media study called “the world UNPLUGGED.” Approximately 1,000 college students from 10 countries were asked to give up all media for 24 hours.

Giving up all media meant no Internet, newspapers or magazines. Furthermore they could not use TVs, phones, iPods or mp3 players, video games or movies. You might think it would be easy to give up these things for a mere 24 hours, but students around the world consistently reported failing the task.

Drumroll Please

Written by Jes-c Brandt

Here at Amherst College, we received a similar, but less extreme challenge. Last Friday was termed “Amherst Unplugged,” and students were encouraged to give up their cell phones and computers for 15 minutes, an hour, or the whole day, depending on what they felt comfortable with.

Well I figured the challenge would be easy enough so I decided to try it myself. Friday morning started easily enough: eating breakfast without my cell phone or iPod didn't prove too difficult. Likewise, I made it through calculus and only reached into my empty pocket searching for my phone to check the time once or twice. I really ought to start wearing a watch.

As usual, when class was over I went to the campus center to check my mail, read, and do some homework before my next class. It didn't take me long to realize just how reliant I am on technology during that slot in my schedule. Without even thinking, I sat down and started looking for my iPod to block out the sound of the busy café while I read.

No big deal—I could easily do work without any music. I lasted maybe half an hour before I thought I was going to go crazy. I kept getting reminded of people I needed to talk to, e-mails I needed to reply to and questions I needed answered. And I wanted to hurry up and do all those things before I forgot. Plus I never knew what time it was. I was constantly nervous I was going to be late for my class.

Eventually I gave up working in the campus center and went back to my room, where at least I have a clock. Somehow I managed to focus on reading a magazine long enough to stop wondering whether I had any important e-mails sitting in my inbox.

Now I went into Amherst Unplugged day knowing I wouldn't be able to be completely unplugged all day because I had a computer science lab. When I arrived, however, I was faced with a hard question. Since I was going to be on the computer anyway was I allowed to sneak a peek at my e-mail? No, I decided if I was going to do this thing, I was going to do it right. So I made it through another hour of the day without my phone or e-mail.

At this point in the day I had a bit of downtime, and I was really curious about whether people had wanted to contact me. In a moment of weakness I reasoned that I would only check to see if I had any missed calls or texts, but I wouldn't respond until the day was over.

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Of course, once I saw the missed calls and messages, I knew they demanded urgent attention. I simply could not ignore the people who had tried to contact me, and so my attempt to unplug ended.

I may have only lasted five hours, but before you pass judgment, I challenge you to try giving up your technology for a day. It's not as easy as it seems.

If you're interested in the world UNPLUGGED study, the website is worth a click. Check it out at www.theworldunplugged.wordpress.com .