

Meet the distracted, multi tasking and gamified workforce of the future.

Description

Recently I was lucky enough to be given an hour to chat with a group of 16 and 17 year olds about Social Media and technology in general.

It started with a general chat about how we communicate in day-to-day life. I was amazed that the first answer I got was “Facebook”. I had twitter, Xbox live, MSN and email before we got to talking! Face to face human interaction. However, as I spoke to them more and more I began to understand why. They take digital communication for granted in the same way we who are older take face to face communication for granted. They thought that was the answer I was looking for. It is just as natural to them.

This intrigued me, so I pursued it with a question I had been discussing earlier with some colleagues. It had revolved around the concept of white noise on social networks. My argument had been that it is human nature to create white noise, the trick is to filter it out. These teenagers said just that. They take in streams and streams of constant chatter from the likes of Facebook, text messages, email and Twitter, but they can just filter out everything except what they want to hear. The difference being, they don't have to think about it. They just do it!

I brought the conversation around to the idea of distraction. They all agreed that they are a distracted generation. In fact whilst talking to them at least two were on Twitter on their phones! The interesting thing was, when I picked them up on it they were able to repeat every word I had said. Whilst they seemed distracted, they were still absorbing everything I was saying. What surprised me more though was how often they said they looked at their phone or non-school / work related media. At least once every twenty minutes. Each time they spend up to five minutes responding to things. That's twenty minutes every hour. In a working day, that represents one hundred and fifty minutes (two and a half hours) of “wasted” time each day. However, these people are always on. They don't see the day in terms of 9 to 5. They see it as a day. If an email comes in at any time of the day, they respond. This is how it will be for their work. Whilst they may seem distracted, they will be working later and more hours than ever and never complain as that is just the way it is.

Finally, I brought the conversation to games, much to their delight. I started talking about [gamification](#) and the use of game mechanics either to achieve real world objectives or to make mundane tasks more interesting. They got it straight away, but seemed amazed it had a name. For them it was just what they did day to day. Setting small goals to achieve larger tasks.

However, what really interested them was a conversation about how games are going to make them a better work force. Bear with me!

Taking two very popular games, World of Warcraft and Call of Duty. In World of Warcraft one of your aims is to get money. You get money to buy or make new things. These could then be sold on or used to achieve new goals or make it easier to achieve previous goals – thus earning more money. Sound familiar? Basic business. They were learning core principals of how business works from World of

Warcraft. Day to day manufacture good or provide services. We earn money by achieving goals. We use that money to buy new things or invest in things that will allow us to achieve different goals or the same goals more efficiently – to earn more money.

Next, I took on Call of Duty. “How on earth can that make you better at working?” they all asked. “You are just shooting bad guys in the face with big guns”. One of them piped up with a gem that I had set myself up for. “Well, you shoot people in the face with weaker guns to start with. Then you earn money by shooting more people, to buy bigger guns to shoot them more efficiently next time.” Brilliant!

However, that was not the point I was trying to make with Call of Duty. I asked them what they did in the game, how they knew what was happening and what they had to do.

They are looking at the main screen to watch for signs of enemy movement. At the same time, they have an eye on the tactical mini map. They also keep an eye on their ammo levels, spike camera displays and teammate positions all whilst listening to environmental sounds and constant chatter on a headset. At the same time, they are using a joy pad with 5 times as many buttons as the good old NES. Yet they are still utterly focused on their main mission. This constant flow of information is filtered and used as they need it without any thought from them.

They are mutli tasking at a level that was previously reserved only for helicopter pilots.

I have not even mentioned the social skills one learns via [online gaming](#).

This is our next generation of workforce. With this kind of ability to multitask and manage vast streams of information, we should see great things from them. Our job as their managers of the future is to understand this new distracted way of working. We need to learn how to focus this kind of ability and get the best from it. It is no longer good enough to ask for 9 to 5 single task working mentality.

Welcome to the always on. multi tasking slightly distracted work force of the future. As my daughter would say. Deal with it.

Category

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Author

andrzej-marczewski