

Who Moved My BlackBerry?

by Wong Li Chih

If you look around you, chances are that 3 out of 5 people are probably on their blackberries.² Since their arrival, blackberries have revolutionised the way we live and work. They provide flexibility and the ability for anyone to connect with anybody and work from anywhere instantly. In theory, this supposedly makes us more productive!

Does it? What is clear is that any person managing this non-stop onslaught of information (and associated nagging feeling that you've missed something), is likely to end up being less productive.

The advantage of a blackberry is that you can work anywhere, anytime. The disadvantage is precisely the same.

A whole new generation, mobile professionals, we call them, have their own culture, lingo, pace and now, "addictions". We have now "crackberries" aka blackberry addicts and even a repetitive stress situation called "blackberry thumb". Yet, we are as wired to our blackberries as ever. If you own a blackberry and disagree, just take this simple test.

Have you found yourself doing any of the following things to or with your blackberry?

- : You sleep with it (and yes, having it on your bedside table counts).
- : You automatically reach for it the moment you hear it or feel it vibrate (generally stopping a conversation or even mid-sentence).
- : You sometimes imagine hearing it or feeling it vibrate.
- : You feel compelled to check it constantly, ignoring those around you.
- : You automatically reach for it the moment you get any information e.g. names, dates, etc.
- : You get angry, feel strong anxiety if you're away from it or think you have misplaced it.
- : You've named it.
- : You talk to or pat it when you think no one is watching.

1. Not to be confused with the novel of the same name by Lucy Kellaway.
2. For the purposes of this article, we use the term "blackberry" in its generic sense. Just like certain other brand names. It denotes the breed of cell phones that include what used to be called PDA (personal digital assistant) and add the functionality of email, calendar, contacts, web browsing, etc. The purpose of such phones is essentially the same and we will use the term "blackberry" to describe those devices.

DECIDE WHEN YOU CAN USE IT

Even if you check it as often as every 15 minutes, once an hour, or once every two hours, you'll find that having a schedule helps. Stifle the urge to check and respond to every email or message instantly.

A University of London study done several years ago found that checking emails/instant messages as they come in, thereby letting it become a distraction and interrupt your flow of concentration, results in greater loss of IQ than smoking pot!

Hence, if your interval for check and response time is immediate, then you will be continually distracted (and likely to lower your IQ); and there is a possibility, in your rush to answer you are more likely to make a mistake. True, you will get through your emails faster, but what else will you have accomplished?

BE A MONO-TASKER

Researchers at the University of Michigan estimate that we lose 20 – 40% of efficiency as a result of multitasking, which wastes up to two to three hours per day.

When distracted (multitasking), you increase the likelihood of making a mistake e.g. sending an email to the wrong recipient or dialling the wrong date, which may have severe consequences involving court attendances or contract deadlines. This means time is wasted 'cycling back' to correct the error or damage control and, more time wasted later, reorienting to other pending tasks.

Remember, it is better to do one thing well than to do many things poorly. If your client is paying for your time, shouldn't they get the benefit of your undivided attention?

DISCUSS EXPECTATIONS WITH COLLEAGUES AND CLIENTS

Being connected allows us to do more and do it faster. With this increased speed comes more opportunity for mistakes. However, is this 'on-call' mentality really necessary?

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SET BOUNDARIES

Technology-like blackberries and the internet has made the world a smaller place. However, this ability to connect with others on a virtually unlimited basis has eroded our sense of personal space and time. We are expected to be available at all hours and even whilst on vacation.

So, discipline yourself, have "blackberry free zones" in your home and specify time when you "unplug". If you are not expecting any extraordinary piece of news or information take a day off from your blackberry. You may experience a certain amount of withdrawal but this can teach you a lot about how much you use it.

If your particular situation doesn't allow for time off from your blackberry, then on weekends, or while on vacation, carve out some time for yourself – to rejuvenate and to spend uninterrupted time with your family.

BLACKBERRY ANONYMOUS

Crackberry.com, the self described #1 site for BlackBerry Users (and Abusers) has developed "13 Steps To Breaking a Crackberry Addiction".

Step 11 reminds that "the world actually functioned before BlackBerries and that people managed to survive with ancient tools like phones and desktop computers...."

Step 6 poignantly suggests that the abuser "make a list of all persons we have harmed through our rudeness, inconsideration and pretentious self-involvement, and make amends to them all."

In summary, YOU need to decide what's right for YOU.

This article simply suggests that you stop and think about what your blackberry means and how you use it. After all, what's the worst possible thing that could happen if you do not respond to an email instantly at 11.30 PM.?

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