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How to prevent digital distractions

The strategies to put in place to build and follow an e-learning course while leaving out all the distractions coming from digital media

The **ability to concentrate** consists of voluntarily fixing one's thoughts on an action or object. In human beings, this ability is limited, and with the hustle and bustle of modern life, it has become even more difficult to resist the thousands of temptations that come from external inputs and pay attention to a speech, lecture or work project. With the advent of technology and the Internet-related world, then, distractions have also become digital, and mobile media have made them available at any time in daily life. However, there are some techniques that can be put in place to **limit digital distractions** and focus on one's study goal.

Digital distractions

Smartphones, always at our fingertips, allow users to access social networks, emails and the dozens of messages that are sent at any time of day by acquaintances, colleagues, friends or participants in WhatsApp groups. This **digitization** of life has led to the spread of distractions, which make it more difficult to focus on a particular goal. In particular, **online learning** and training are threatened by external tools, which can be a temptation to distraction, which could undermine the student's ability to concentrate and, consequently, the success of the course.

Social media is one of the most "dangerous" temptations, tending to most frequently undermine people's ability to concentrate. The possibility of accessing social via one's smartphone, from which one can hardly separate oneself, has made it more frequent to visit one's pages, and the temptation to continuous interaction at the expense of other activities has become a real risk. Most users check their Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn page several times a day. But it is not uncommon for what should be a quick check of updates to turn into dozens of minutes spent browsing on one's favorite social. We have already seen the benefits and useful strategies in using **LinkedIn** in education, and there is no doubt about the effectiveness and importance of using social media, to promote or build an e-learning course. But, the other side of the coin shows the risk of inappropriate use of these tools, which can be a source of distraction But, the other side of the coin shows the risk of inappropriate use of these tools, which can be a distraction during an e-learning course. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to a conscious use of social media.

Before figuring out what techniques can be used to reduce external inputs that can throw off concentration, it is good to understand what **the main types of digital distractions** are. Let's analyze the main ones:

1. **Connection and communication**. E-mails, miscellaneous messaging, and notifications from social media make it extremely difficult to maintain focus: when, during an online course, we receive a business communication, we tend to interrupt the flow of learning to read it; picking up the thread of the lesson will be difficult for the learner.
2. **Concentration and multitasking.** It is well known that work days are often full and the worker tends to multitask. Unfortunately, while understandable, this mode is not very functional during an online session: the fragmentation of attention and concentration on different activities will result in fluctuating learning if not, in the worst case, invalidated.

How to reduce digital distractions

Those who find themselves wanting to bring an e-learning course to life must follow certain steps, as explained in a previous **article**. During the design phase, it is also good to realize that the user may run into several digital distractions: therefore, it is useful from the start to think of some effective strategies to reduce distractions.

To achieve this goal and provide the user with an incentive to maintain concentration during e-learning lessons, a number of strategies can be followed. **Here are four tips** that might come in handy when designing an online course:

1. **Create timed challenges**, to keep users' concentration high at all times. Tests and simulations can be a good way to capture students' attention and keep it high throughout the course. Theoretical lectures, for example, can be interrupted by short timed tests, which can serve to check learning. A mechanism can also be provided whereby the student has to repeat the lesson in case the system does not record actions on his or her part. In this way, the learner will be incentivized to stay focused on the online course, avoiding any kind of distraction.
2. **Simplify the design** so that the platform interface is intuitive and user-friendly. To achieve this, it is essential to make sure that the user knows his or her way around perfectly: neutral colors, drop-down menus, and short, clear information can help. The speed and ease of use of the platform would thus discourage students from engaging in other external inputs, who would otherwise lose sight of the lessons.
3. Create **engaging content** that departs from the traditional mode of training, with a teacher speaking while slides scroll across the screen. In order to make sure that the user is not only interested in the topic, but also "rapt" by the lecture he or she is attending, it is possible to include moments of **gamification** in the course, which fully engage the student. In this way, people will feel that they are participants and actors in the learning, and a simple lesson can be transformed into an educational and entertaining experience.
4. **Personalize** the training, so as to offer the user the answers to his or her needs, giving him or her the opportunity to build a tailor-made learning path that corresponds to his or her needs and expectations. To make the training even more effective, the user could be put in a position to move around the platform according to his or her gaps, in order to make up or reinforce necessary aspects. Concentration can also be captured through customized tests that send effective feedback back to the trainer. In contrast, generic training could lead the user to easily succumb to external distractions because his attention would not be captured by lessons that do not match his precise interests.

Users' strategies

We have seen what techniques e-learning course creators can use to reduce digital distractions and help their users focus on the lessons at hand. But learners, for their part, also have strategies at their disposal that can help them become aware of the distractions around them and to act accordingly, putting in place useful gimmicks to ward off counterproductive external inputs. Here are the tips that a user can follow:

1. Try to **perceive the distraction**. The moment you find yourself following up on external inputs, which take your attention away from the main goal, stop and recognize what you are doing as a distraction. To understand how you got to that point, it might be helpful to take a mental journey backwards and reconstruct the actions you did previously that led you to give in to distraction. If you really want to try to eliminate these temptations, it is crucial to avoid blaming the outside world or the inability to focus: being aware of following up on distractions is a key step in dealing with them.
2. **Try to resist**. Once you have identified the distraction, you can finally try to fight it. To accomplish this, one strategy might be to use a timer, which will scan and **schedule your work time** and your break time. This could help you focus sustainably and effectively on your study goal for short but continuous periods.
3. Identify something that **encourages** you. Another technique for increasing concentration is to create small rewards for yourself to give yourself once you have achieved a goal. An action that is a temptation if done during an e-learning course can become an encouragement to give yourself once the class is over. For example, if one does not give in to the temptation to check social media, notifications, or messages during the course, this can be done at the end of the lesson, thus not letting one's concentration be jeopardized.
4. **Deceive digital distractions**. If you can't resist the temptation to check your phone every time you hear the sound of a notification or message, you can always turn to technology. It sounds like a paradox, but even to get rid of digital distractions, technology can be our ally. It might be helpful, for example, to set your phone to "silent" mode to prevent its sounds from distracting your attention from your main focus. If that doesn't work either, you can also turn off your smartphone's data, so that you take away its ability to access the network-this way you won't be able to receive notifications, emails or messages from social media.