



I Can't Get My Work Done!

How Collaboration & Social Tools Drain Productivity

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Executive Summary and Key Findings

In an effort to better understand the impact that electronic distractions have on the workplace, social email provider harmon.ie (pronounced 'harmony') commissioned a survey of 515 IT users working in US and global companies. The survey was fielded March 11-29, 2011 by online market research firm uSamp (United Sample). See [Survey Demographics](#) for details.

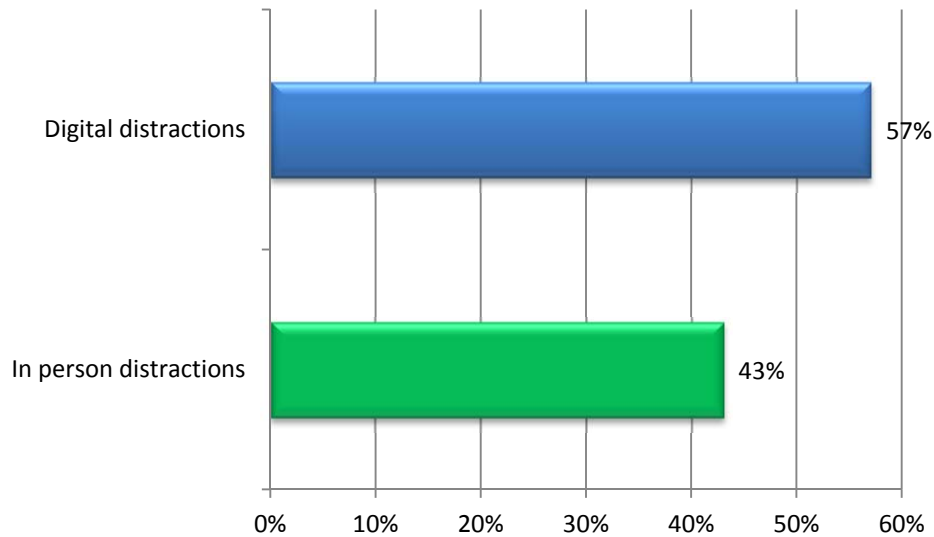
The survey found that:

- The majority (57%) of work interruptions now involve either using collaboration and social tools like email, social networks, text messaging and IM, or switching windows among disparate standalone tools and applications. In fact, 45% of employees work only 15 minutes or less without getting interrupted, and 53% waste at least one hour a day due to all types of distractions.
- That hour per day translates into £3,277.50 of wasted productivity per person per year, assuming an average salary of £14.25/hourⁱ. That is more than the average driver will spend this year to own and maintain a car, according to the Automobile Association (AA)ⁱⁱ. That means that for businesses with 1,000 employees, the cost of employee interruptions exceeds £3.2 million per year. The actual cost of distraction is even higher in terms of negative impacts on work output, work quality, and relationships with clients and co-workers.
- The increasingly common addiction to web-based activity – which psychologists call 'online compulsive disorder'ⁱⁱⁱ – is pervasive in the workplace. For example, 2 out of 3 people will tune out of face-to-face meetings to communicate digitally with someone else. The addiction is also taking over people's personal lives. Case in point: the majority of people under the age of 40 stay digitally connected in bed, and 44% of people under 30 stay connected during a night out at the movies.
- Two-thirds of companies and technology users are pursuing tools and strategies to minimize digital distractions, reflecting an understanding of the need to restore productivity that is being sapped by misuse of digital applications.

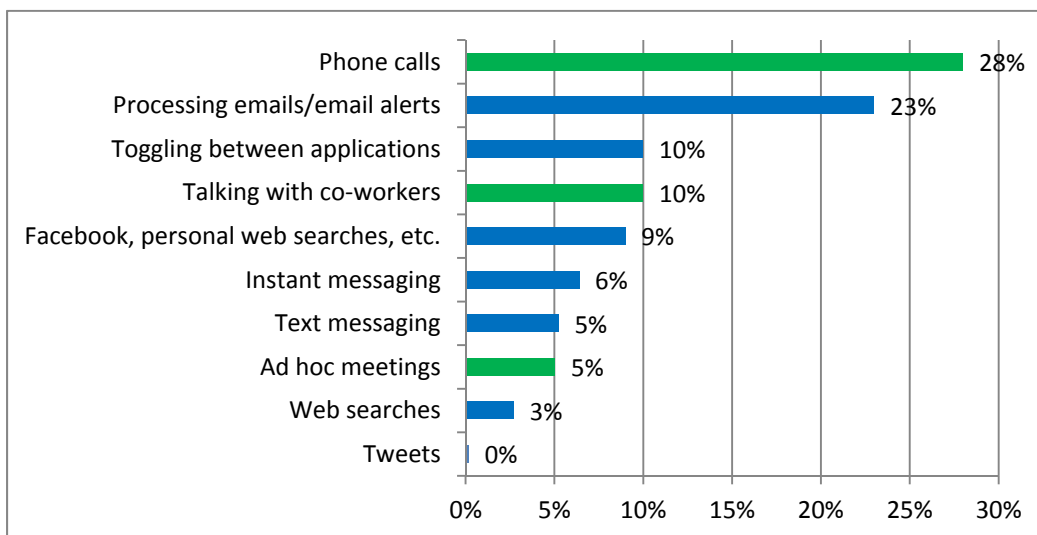
Most workplace distractions are electronic

- **Information technology – intended at least in part to save time – is now the major source of workplace interruptions.** While traditional activities like phone calls, talking with co-workers, and ad hoc meetings account for 43% of all workplace interruptions, the majority (57%) comes from using collaboration and social tools like email, text messaging and IM, toggling between applications, and personal online activities such as Facebook and Web searches.

What are the most common distractions at your work?

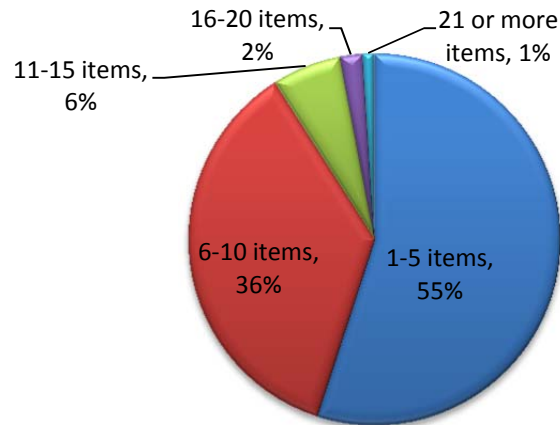


Breakdown of the most common workplace distractions (By Activity)

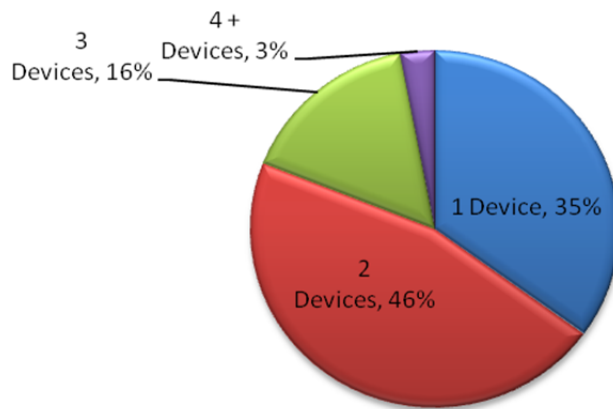


- **Toggleing between multiple applications/windows/tabs/items on the desktop contributes to the problem of distraction, along with using multiple devices at the same time.** 45% of survey respondents keep at least six items open simultaneously, and 65% report using one to three desktop or mobile devices in addition to their main computer.

How many open items (applications, windows, documents, emails, browser tabs, etc.) in total do you typically have open simultaneously while you work?

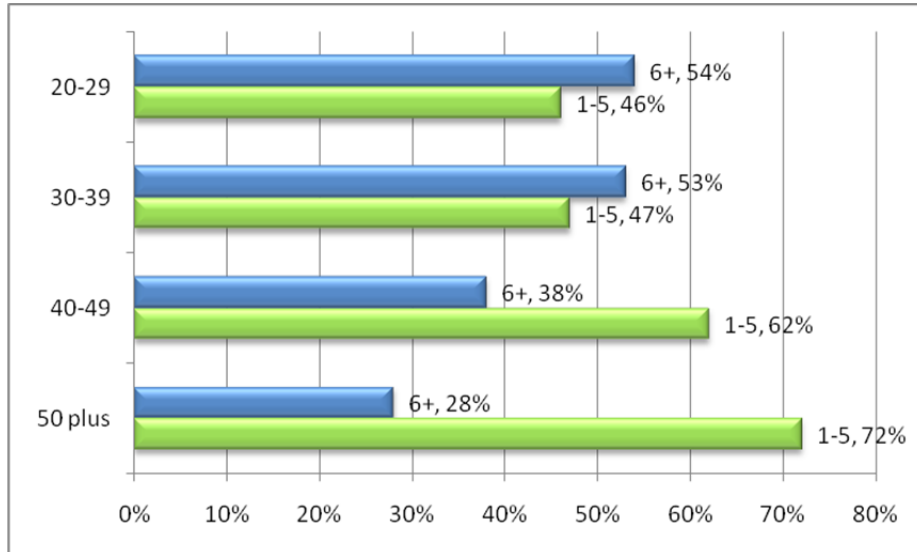


How many devices do you typically have open simultaneously while you're working?

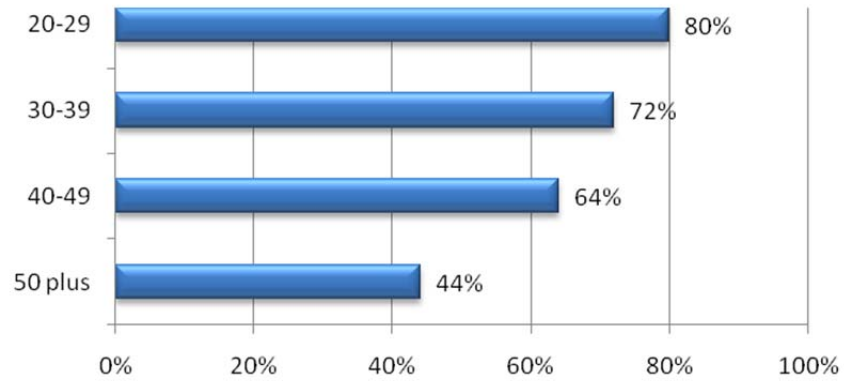


- Younger workers tend to keep the most items open at the same time and use the most devices.

Number of open items, by Age Group

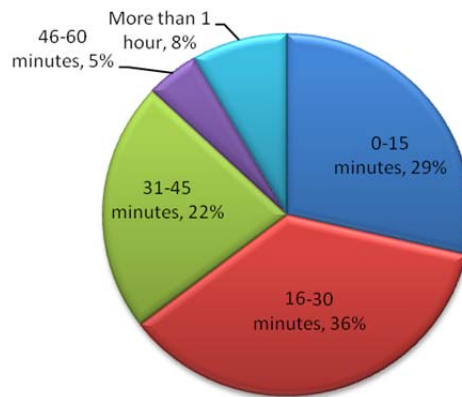


Uses two or more devices at the same time, by Age Group



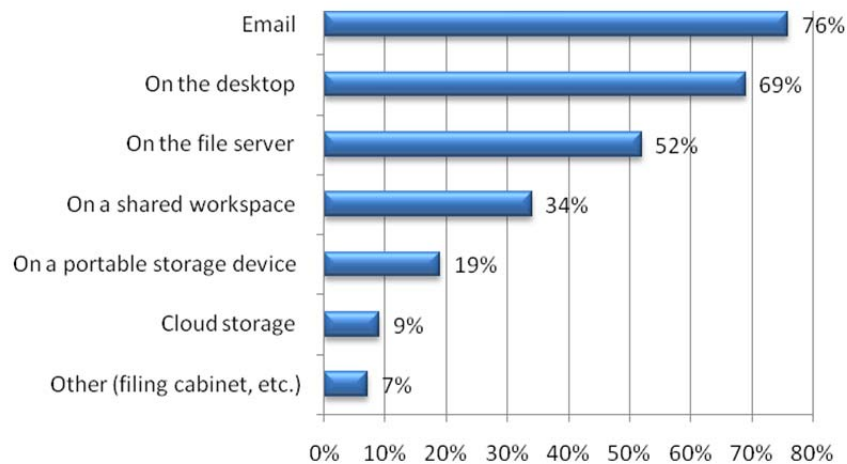
- **Document chaos and searching for documents also contribute to digital distraction and are significant drains on productivity.** Users waste 30 minutes a day (16 days a year!) searching for documents, on average. That's £1,638 per employee per year in lost productivity (assuming £14.25/hour), and more than half the vacation time as the average UK employee gets each year^{iv}.

How much time do you spend per work day looking for documents that you need?



- **The #1 place where people go to find a document is their email Inbox.** After that, they go to their desktop or file server. People search 3 locations, on average, to find a document.

If you are looking for a document, where do you typically look? Check all that apply.

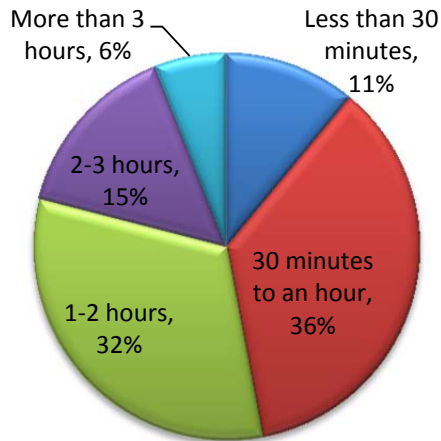


- **The problem of wasted time is exacerbated by the use of email attachments instead of posting documents to a central repository, where they can be easily located.** According to the survey, users email 2 or more documents a day to an average of 5 people for review. That effectively creates 10 new documents per day, which end up being stored across multiple locations. This creates a challenge for workers searching for the latest document version and merging feedback from multiple reviewers.

Work output and quality suffer

- **More than half of workers waste at least one hour a day on interruptions**, costing businesses £3,277.50 per person (assuming an average £14.25/hour wage). That's more than the average driver will spend this year to own and maintain their car, according to AA.

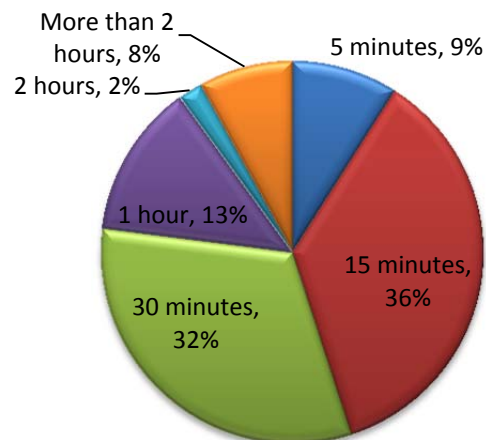
How much time do you waste every day dealing with interruptions?



People age 30-49 waste the most time dealing with interruptions. 25% of people age 30-49 waste at least two hours a day dealing with interruptions, versus 15% of all other workers.

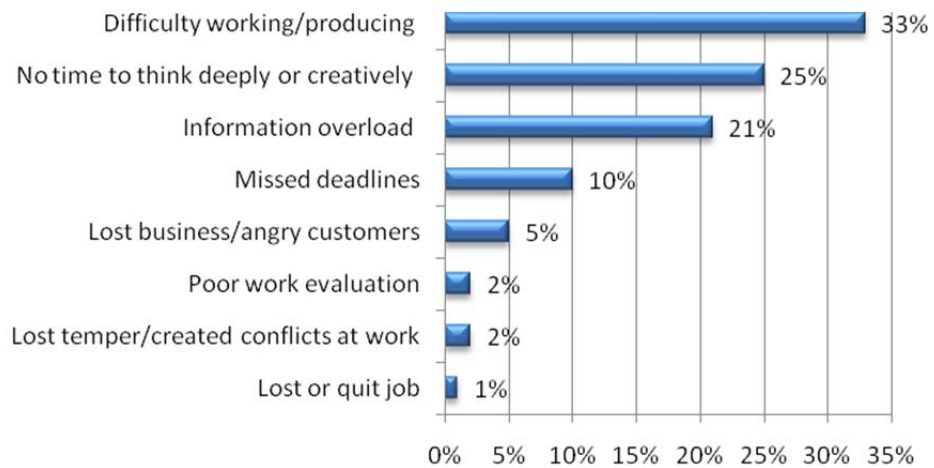
- **45% of today's workers can't work more than 15 minutes without being interrupted.**

How long can you work on a task (on average) without being interrupted?



- **The actual cost of distraction is even higher.** A third of respondents report they have difficulty working, and one in four can't think deeply or creatively. Others report missing deadlines, losing clients, and getting poor work evaluations.

What problems have these interruptions created for you?

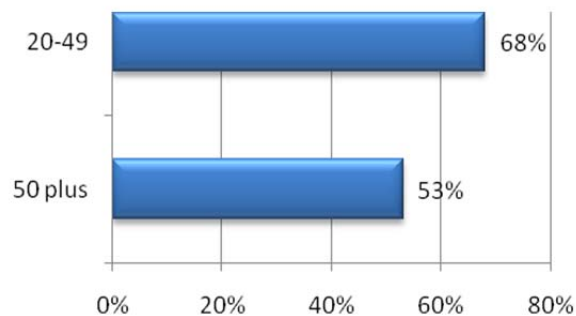


Refusal to disconnect leads to rudeness

Psychologists call the increasingly common addiction to web-based activity 'online compulsive disorder.' This disorder is becoming pervasive in the workplace as well as in people's personal lives.

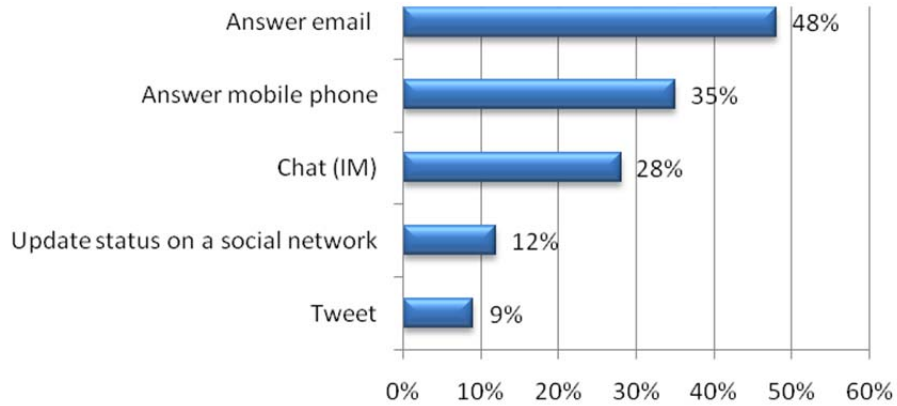
- **2 out of 3 people (64 %) will tune out of an in-person meeting to communicate digitally with someone else. While people under 50 are more likely to 'tune out,' the majority of people in all age groups will interrupt a meeting at some point.**

During a meeting, will you engage in any of these activities (answer an email, answer a mobile phone, Chat (IM) Tweet, or update your status on a social network) at least sometimes? (by age group)



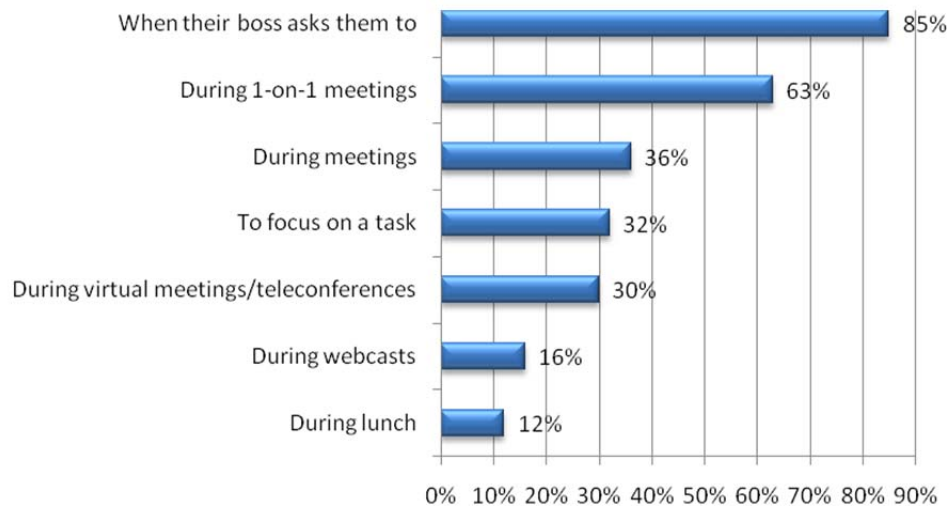
- **Most of the time, people tune out to answer an email, mobile phone, or to chat.**

During a meeting, will you engage in these activities? (Check all that apply).



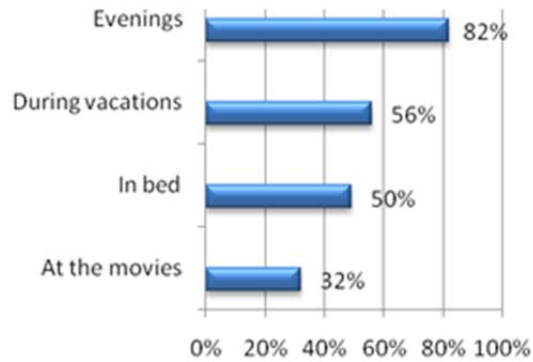
- **While 85% of survey respondents will disconnect when their boss asks them to, and 63% will disconnect during one-on-one meetings, only a minority will disconnect to focus on a task or during virtual meetings, teleconferences, webcasts, or lunch.**

When do people disconnect at work? (Check all that apply).



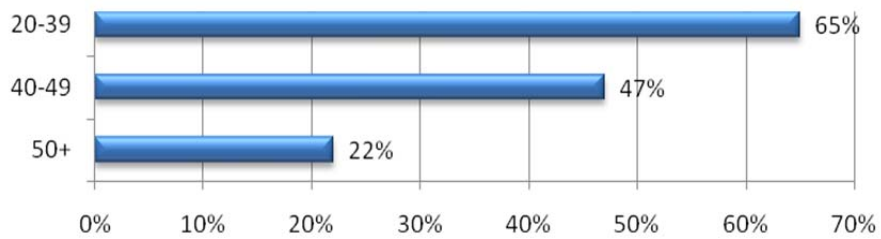
- **The majority of people of all age groups stay connected evenings, during vacation, and in bed, at least sometimes.**

People who stay connected, at least sometimes, during personal time.



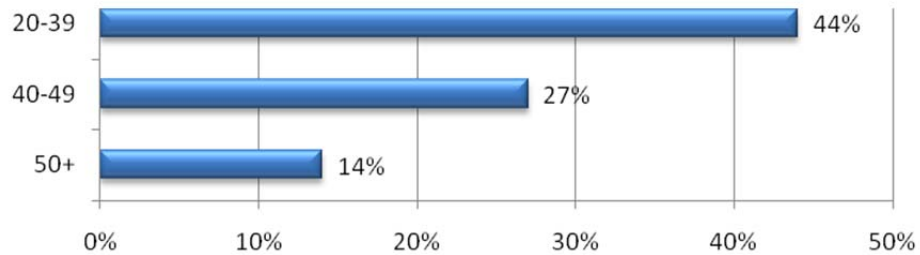
- **65% of people under 40 stay connected in bed, at least sometimes.**

People who stay connected in bed at least sometimes, by Age Group



- **44 % of people under 40 stay connected at the movies, at least sometimes.**

People who stay connected at the movies, at least sometimes, by Age Group

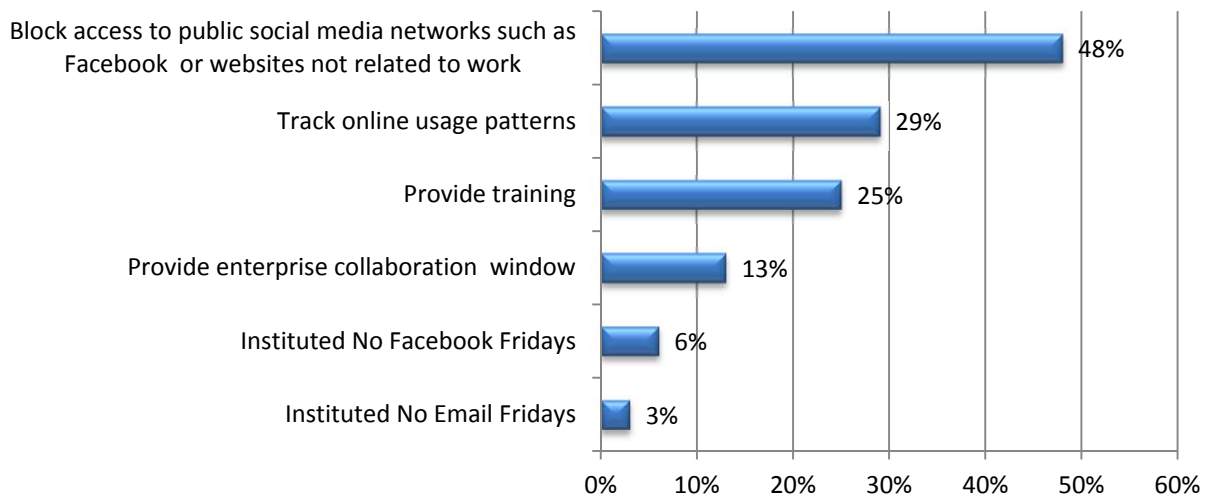


Strategies to minimize distractions at work

Despite the attachment to their digital tools and devices, both companies and end users recognize the productivity challenges created by these technologies and have implemented a variety of tools and strategies in an attempt to limit digital-related disruptions, as follows:

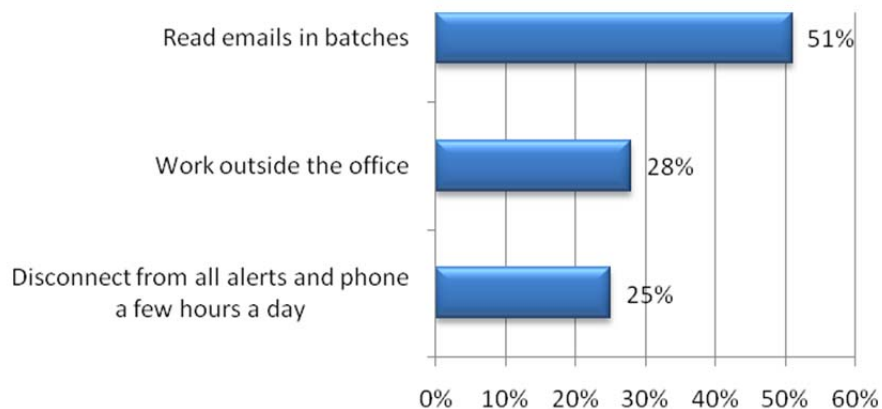
- **68% said their employers use corporate policies and/or technologies to minimize distractions at work. The most popular policies are to block access to public social media networks such as Facebook or websites unrelated to work.**

What tools/policies has your organization introduced to minimize distractions at work? (Check all that apply).



- **73% of business users try to minimize distractions, primarily by reading emails in batches, working outside the office, and disconnecting from IM/email and phone a few hours a day.**

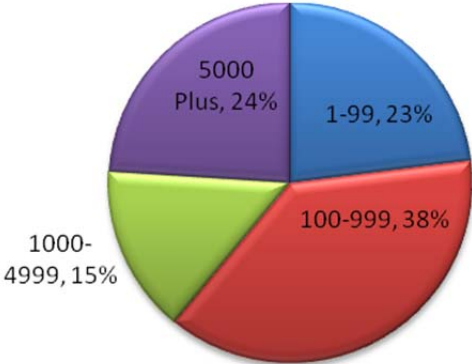
Which tools/practices do you follow to minimize distractions at work? (Check all that apply).



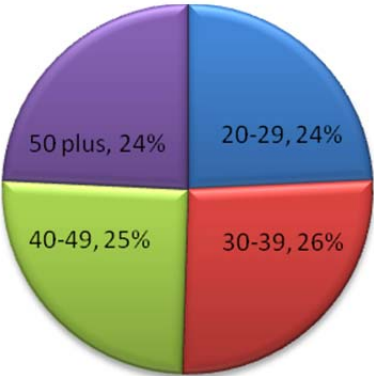
Survey Demographics

Online market research firm uSamp fielded the survey on digital distraction March 11-29, 2011 to 515 IT users. Respondents work in US and global businesses of all sizes, in the sales, marketing, human resources, or legal departments, and they are at least 20 years old. Margin of error is +/- 4.38 %.

Number of employees at respondents' current employers



Respondents' age



About harmon.ie

harmon.ie (pronounced 'harmony') is a provider of social email software that brings document collaboration to *every* business user by transforming the email client into a collaboration and social workspace. Thousands of businesses already use harmon.ie social email to vastly increase user adoption of Microsoft SharePoint or Google Docs for document sharing, collaboration, and social networking. Formerly known as Mainsoft, the company has been building cross-platform enterprise software since 1993. For more information, visit <http://harmon.ie>.

Contact Us

To find out how harmon.ie can help your organization to minimize distracting context switches, eliminate document chaos, and get everyone on the same page, reach out to us at one of the following contact points:

In the US, call
1-800-624-6946

In Europe and Asia, call
+44-203-318-1369

All other locations, call:
408-907-1339

Email: info@harmon.ie
Twitter: @TeamHarmonie
www.harmon.ie

ⁱ Average annual cost of distraction per employee of an hour a day for 230 days at £14.25 per hour equates to an annual cost of £3277.50.

Source: Office for National Statistics - Results from the 2010 ASHE (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings) show that median weekly pay for full-time employees in the UK at April 2010 was £499 or £14.25 per hour.

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=285>

ⁱⁱ **Cost of running a new car** worth up to £16,000 is £3051 per year according to the AA

http://www.theaa.com/allaboutcars/advice/advice_rcosts_petrol_table.jsp

ⁱⁱⁱ **The Economist**. "The Perils of Multi-tasking." May 10, 2006. <http://www.economist.com/node/6909524>

^{iv} 30 minutes a day for 230 days at £14.25 per hour equates to an annual cost of £1,638 per employee per year.