

POWERING DOWN

Going off-grid in the digital age: can or should we switch off on holiday?



Digital technology has had a massive impact on our work and social lives. Social and mobile technologies enable us to connect to people on a new scale as we are in touch with work, family and friends. The ability to be available and connected 24/7 is without a doubt beneficial – giving many people the possibility of mobile working away from the desk and opportunities to remain connected with any device, anywhere and at any time.

Although technology brings numerous benefits for our work and social lives, there is evidence to suggest that it has become increasingly hard for people to switch off from work, often leading to the blurring of lines between work and leisure time. Some of us are compelled to constantly check and

answer work emails on our private mobile phones. And we may feel concerned about 'missing out' on what is going on at the office. Holidays and leisure trips have traditionally been our opportunity to switch off, recharge and refresh our body and mind. In the past, travel has been a means for us to see new places, while escaping the mundane and leaving our everyday life, worries and work behind for a while. The idea of needing a holiday is, in essence, to leave home to restore physical and mental health. This complete break from work and the mundane may now be changing by the opportunities for constant connection driven by our digital devices.

So what happens if 'going off the grid' is no longer an option in our hyper-connected and work-centred lifestyles? This is a question that is very important, especially for the generation of knowledge-workers and always-connected millennials. Ask yourself: when was the last time you simply went offline, off the grid, without being available? Many people remember the last time of truly switching off as an era before social networks and mobile smartphone devices. But why is it more important than ever to switch off?

Researchers at Bournemouth University, including Dr. Barbara Neuhofer and Prof. Adele Ladkin, are currently working with academics from all over the UK to understand these changed work-life balance practices and the consequences of digital technologies on travel in the digital age.

A recent study has shown that staying constantly connected on holiday creates not only a barrier for people to truly relax, but in many cases diminishes the quality of the holiday experience, as digital technology interferes with being present in the 'now', as it distracts from – and in some cases destroys – living the 'real tourist life'. Having connection and being connected during holidays often leads to self-induced pressure and social obligations to connect to work and

share the holiday with the social circle online.

As people increasingly experience the negative effects of our always-on culture, it is important to raise the question of what work-life boundaries still mean to each of us in the digital age. Has it become normal to be constantly on call 24/7 or do we need to set lines between our work, home and travel lives? And most importantly, why do we need to switch off and how can we do that?

So what can you do to disconnect to keep technology in its place and enjoy your upcoming break?

Here are tips to help you switch off during your holiday:

1. *Good old 'out of office': To disconnect and go offline, manage expectations online first. Let your work and social network know you are disconnecting – it decreases expectations and pressure.*
2. *Digital information diet. If you have to connect, keep the amount and time you spend checking your social network updates and news to a minimum.*
3. *Live in the now. Experience and live the holiday for yourself and with those around you, rather than online social networks.*
4. *You could even turn your mobile off (scary, we know!).*
5. *Self-develop. Why not use time and space offline for reflection and self-development?*
6. *Talk to your employers about expectations – do you know what is expected of you in terms of staying in touch?*
7. *Consider the expectations of your social networks – are you always online for their benefit? Enjoy your experience first, share it later.*
8. *Check your habits. Are you habitually addicted to checking your mobile, to the extent that you don't know that you are doing it? Ask your travelling partner to observe what you do.*
9. *Could it wait? Consider the urgency of the information you are checking – does it have to be right now?*

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