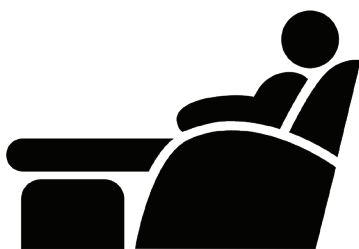


Chapter 6



DESPERATE DETOX



What's the Non-Obvious Trend?

As technology, media clutter and physical things increase the complexity of our daily lives, people are desperately seeking new ways to enjoy more moments of reflection by simplifying.

The first time I wrote about *Desperate Detox*, it was all about trying to find a way to escape the irresistible allure of the small screen. As our smartphones dominated hours of every day and the continual beeps and chimes of social media alerts invaded every waking moment – it seemed as though technology was to blame.

Three years have passed since then and we are still as accosted by the beeps and chimes of technology as we ever were ... but this trend is no longer about humans versus technology. In 2017, the reason I chose to feature *Desperate Detox* as an annual selection once more is because it has come to describe a broader rejection of complexity instead of simply a rejection of technology.

In an interesting twist to the trend, technology itself has started to

offer supportive tools to help provide that much needed “detox” from complexity in all forms.

Perhaps nowhere is this more prevalent than in a growing range of tools that allow us to optimize our lives by slowing down, blocking out or otherwise adapting the things we spend our time on.

Detox By Slowing Down

In Norway, a popular public television series called “slow TV” has depicted journeys such as a cruise ship’s 134 hour journey up the country’s west coast, an 7 hour video of a knitting circle – and its most popular (and ridiculed) show – “National Firewood Night,” a 12 hour broadcast which features logs being cut and then burned in a fireplace. The channel was such a cult hit that Netflix recently picked it up to syndicate to customers outside of Norway.

In Spain, a curious initiative called “Eating Without Noise” is an effort to fight back against the “café effect” – where restaurants get louder due to the combination of loud conversation and service. So far more than 20 restaurants across the country have declared their intentions to be “quiet dining” venues, including several Michelin-starred restaurants such as Hotel Unico in Madrid. To be on the list, an establishment agrees to maintain a certain minimum distance between tables, add proper sound insulation and encourage diners not to be so noisy when enjoying meals.

The point behind both of these is that there is another path to *Desperate Detox* which on the surface seems to contradict Jeff Kuo’s speed watching tactics for television. How can slow TV and fast TV coexist as part of the same trend?

The idea of *Desperate Detox* at its core is about people seeking more simplicity and less clutter in their lives. Some find it by minimizing the time they spend watching television. Others find it through the therapeutic calm of watching a log burn on the television for hours.

Digital Detox And Travel

In June of 2016, Intel Security (makers of the McAfee Security Software)

released the results of a global survey they had conducted asking travelers just how often they were able to resist the temptation of their devices and just choose to enjoy a travel experience without the interference of technology.

The numbers were discouraging.

Canadians were the most successful at staying away from social media use (61 percent) while on vacation. Coming in a close second were the French (60 per cent), followed by Mexicans (54 percent), Germans (54 percent), Americans (53 percent), Dutch (51 percent), Brazilians (51 percent), Spaniards (44 per cent) and Singaporeans (42 per cent).

The survey went on to note that despite the “winning” performance by Canadians, more than half (54 per cent) of Canadian participants who intended to unplug from their digital devices on vacation were still unable to do so ... even despite three-quarters of participants saying their vacation was more enjoyable after they unplugged their smartphones and tablets.

So if vacations would be more enjoyable by unplugging, and most of us (like the Canadians) have a hard time *choosing* to do so intentionally – what do we do? Several tour operators have launched recent initiatives to help you find an answer to that question.

For example, pioneering travel tour operator Intrepid Travel launched a series of “Digital Detox” tours of the world, promising “exclusive departures where there’ll be no social media, no phones and no cameras. For real. This is travel like it used to be.”

There are others creating similar experiences. Discover Outdoors runs tech-free canoe camping adventures and Paragon Guides brings people out to do llama trekking. Via Yoga runs a series of themed get-aways and Wanderlust holds day long festivals on mindful living.

All of this innovation in the travel industry is aimed at helping people use their time when traveling to truly rest and recharge – detoxing their bodies and their minds without the interruption of technology.

Ownership Is Overrated

Having a great detox moment when you travel can be therapeutic, but it’s unlikely to last if you return to a clutter filled home. Over the past year,

one best-selling book has been credited with single handedly starting a “decluttering” trend of its own. The book is called *The Life Changing Magic Of Tidying Up* and it is authored by a Japanese professional organizer named Marie Kondo. The book offers a series of tips for decluttering one’s life – including how to reorganize closets, throw out things you don’t really need and conquer your unreasonable emotional attachment to “stuff.”

The book sparked a movement and fit perfectly into a macro trend that has received far more attention – the growth of the “sharing economy.” This term is frequently used to describe the rapid growth of platforms and services like Uber and AirBNB which are causing people around the world to rethink their traditional notions of ownership.

According to a survey from Harris Poll, 78% of millennials—compared to 59% of baby boomers—“would rather pay for an experience than material goods.” The research supports their belief that experiences are more worthwhile. In his book *Happy Money*, Harvard marketing professor and social scientist Michael Norton suggests that for most people spending money on experiences rather than possessions creates far more happiness.

This shifting belief along with the fact that the collaborative economy allows for more sharing and less owning in many situations means that a growing method for reducing complexity and enjoying a successful *Desperate Detox* is indeed finding a way to acquire less stuff.

Tech-Enabled Detoxing

At this point it might be tempting to assume that “Desperate Detox” is a trend mainly focused on trying to get rid of clutter or to optimize and slow things down. The flip side that adds a bit of nuance to this trend is considering how many ways people are finding to create moments of detox by strategically *speeding up instead of slowing down*.

In the middle of 2016, reporter Jeff Guo published an article in the *Washington Post* that horrified film makers and content creators around the world. The article delved into a curious habit he had developed to save time – watching television and movies at two times their normal speed.

Using custom software he would accelerate his viewing, allowing him to stream an entire season of a show in a matter of hours. It was his extreme but understandable response to the explosion of scripted and unscripted entertainment that is now available at the click of a button. More than 400 scripted shows were released by American production teams in 2015 – nearly double the number in 2009.

On top of all that, streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and YouTube's new RED offer hours more entertainment available whenever you have an idle moment to spare.

Yet the obvious question you might wonder after reading about this curious habit is how anyone could prefer this in the first place. Wouldn't watching a show at an accelerated speed result in chipmunk-like voices and an awful viewing experience?

To let people answer that question themselves, the *Washington Post* also published a sample video clip alongside Guo's contentious article where readers could actually watch a short segment of popular drama *Game of Thrones* in regular speed and at an accelerated speed.

For most people who watched the sample, the accelerated watching experience was undeniably better.

Dialogue came faster, pauses were shortened, and when you returned to watching it at the "normal" speed – everything just seemed to be moving in frustratingly slow motion. Despite the protests of the creators and their desire to keep the artistic integrity intact – the article convincingly encouraged people to discover and adopt this time hack for themselves.

Accelerating video is not the only example over the past year of how technology is helping to offer "detox" from complexity either. A company called Circle recently partnered with Disney to offer a \$99 device that watches children's activity online and manages time limits for how long kids are allowed to use devices. Once a limit is reached, access can be switched off.

Going one step further, earlier this year an NYU student named Chino Kim developed a pair of glasses called "Screeners" that immediately turn opaque when they detect that the wearer is viewing a mobile device screen to discourage device time.

What all these efforts have in common is their focus on helping

people to “detox” from the noise created by technology and media by using technology itself to solve the problem. Sometimes, though, the best way to silence the technology is to find moments where people might elect to remove it completely.

Why It Matters:

The complexity of life today from a combination of “always-on” technology to exponentially more demands on our time and attention continues to drive a need among people to find new ways to escape the chaos.

The need for *Desperate Detox* is one that most of us can immediately empathize and recall a moment or two when we wished for this ourselves. Yet the most interesting evolution of this idea is that it no longer is simply about escaping technology. Complexity rather than technology is the enemy, and is increasingly being solved by products, ideas and life-hacks that allow each of us to find more moments of tranquility and more ways to save our own time, or at least spend it in more fruitful ways to increase our own happiness.

How To Use This Trend:

- ✓ **Create more mute buttons** - What happens when you email a customer too frequently? They unsubscribe. What if instead of letting them leave, you gave them a way to turn on a mute button for a period of time – or at least turn down the volume a bit? The best marketers know there is a forgotten third option besides letting people opt out or opt in. You can let them *opt for less*. In doing this, you give people a way to reduce the noise without leaving altogether – and the same technique works for situations far beyond email.
- ✓ **Simplify without dumbing down** - Simplicity has long been an ideal in communications, but sometimes it can also cause you to accidentally dumb down a message or experience and make it meaningless. In the future, communicators of any message

and creators alike will need to consider how their experiences can be set up to offer something simpler, while still maintaining the essence of what made it great in the first place. This will take great communication skills, powerful writing, and a significant amount of creative thinking as well.

- ✓ **Detox your customer experience** – One of the biggest trends in retail is a shift from promotion to experiences, and the best are ones where customers delight in the chance to leave the outside world behind and engage more deeply with a brand. Doing so requires a disciplined process to remove complexity in everything from salesperson interactions to crowded endcap displays, while making sure that the use of technology like augmented or virtual reality is strategic and never gratuitous.