

## **Quit Social Media. Your Career May Depend on It.**

By CAL NEWPORT

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1 I'm a millennial computer scientist who also writes books and  
2 runs a blog. Demographically speaking I should be a heavy  
3 social media user, but that is not the case. I've never had a  
4 social media account.

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6 At the moment, this makes me an outlier, but I think many  
7 more people should follow my lead and quit these services.  
8 There are many issues with social media, from its corrosion of  
9 civic life to its cultural shallowness, but the argument I want to  
10 make here is more pragmatic: You should quit social media  
11 because it can hurt your career.

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13 This claim, of course, runs counter to our current  
14 understanding of social media's role in the professional sphere.  
15 We've been told that it's important to tend to your so-called  
16 social media brand, as this provides you access to  
17 opportunities you might otherwise miss and supports the  
18 diverse contact network you need to get ahead. Many people in  
19 my generation fear that without a social media presence, they  
20 would be invisible to the job market.

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22 In a recent New York magazine essay, Andrew Sullivan recalled  
23 when he started to feel obligated to update his blog every half-  
24 hour or so. It seemed as if everyone with a Facebook account  
25 and a smartphone now felt pressured to run their own high-  
26 stress, one-person media operation, and "the once-  
27 unimaginable pace of the professional blogger was now the  
28 default for everyone," he wrote.

30 I think this behavior is misguided. In a capitalist economy, the  
31 market rewards things that are rare and valuable. Social media  
32 use is decidedly not rare or valuable. Any 16-year-old with a  
33 smartphone can invent a hashtag or repost a viral article. The  
34 idea that if you engage in enough of this low-value activity, it  
35 will somehow add up to something of high value in your career  
36 is the same dubious alchemy that forms the core of most snake  
37 oil and flimflam in business.

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39 Professional success is hard, but it's not complicated. The  
40 foundation to achievement and fulfillment, almost without  
41 exception, requires that you hone a useful craft and then apply  
42 it to things that people care about. This is a philosophy perhaps  
43 best summarized by the advice Steve Martin used to give  
44 aspiring entertainers: "Be so good they can't ignore you." If you  
45 do that, the rest will work itself out, regardless of the size of  
46 your Instagram following.

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48 A common response to my social media skepticism is the idea  
49 that using these services "can't hurt." In addition to honing  
50 skills and producing things that are valuable, my critics note,  
51 why not also expose yourself to the opportunities and  
52 connections that social media can generate? I have two  
53 objections to this line of thinking.

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55 First, interesting opportunities and useful connections are not  
56 as scarce as social media proponents claim. In my own  
57 professional life, for example, as I improved my standing as an  
58 academic and a writer, I began receiving more interesting  
59 opportunities than I could handle. I currently have filters on  
60 my website aimed at reducing, not increasing, the number of  
61 offers and introductions I receive.

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63 My research on successful professionals underscores that this  
64 experience is common: As you become more valuable to the  
65 marketplace, good things will find you. To be clear, I'm not  
66 arguing that new opportunities and connections are  
67 unimportant. I'm instead arguing that you don't need social  
68 media's help to attract them.

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70 My second objection concerns the idea that social media is  
71 harmless. Consider that the ability to concentrate without  
72 distraction on hard tasks is becoming increasingly valuable in  
73 an increasingly complicated economy. Social media weakens  
74 this skill because it's engineered to be addictive. The more you  
75 use social media in the way it's designed to be used —  
76 persistently throughout your waking hours — the more your  
77 brain learns to crave a quick hit of stimulus at the slightest hint  
78 of boredom.

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80 Once this Pavlovian connection is solidified, it becomes hard to  
81 give difficult tasks the unbroken concentration they require,  
82 and your brain simply won't tolerate such a long period  
83 without a fix. Indeed, part of my own rejection of social media  
84 comes from this fear that these services will diminish my  
85 ability to concentrate — the skill on which I make my living.

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87 The idea of purposefully introducing into my life a service  
88 designed to fragment my attention is as scary to me as the idea  
89 of smoking would be to an endurance athlete, and it should be  
90 to you if you're serious about creating things that matter.

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92 Perhaps more important, however, than my specific objections  
93 to the idea that social media is a harmless lift to your career, is  
94 my general unease with the mind-set this belief fosters. A  
95 dedication to cultivating your social media brand is a  
96 fundamentally passive approach to professional advancement.

97 It diverts your time and attention away from producing work  
98 that matters and toward convincing the world that you matter.  
99 The latter activity is seductive, especially for many members of  
100 my generation who were raised on this message, but it can be  
101 disastrously counterproductive.

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103 Most social media is best described as a collection of somewhat  
104 trivial entertainment services that are currently having a good  
105 run. These networks are fun, but you're deluding yourself if  
106 you think that Twitter messages, posts and likes are a  
107 productive use of your time.

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109 If you're serious about making an impact in the world, power  
110 down your smartphone, close your browser tabs, roll up your  
111 sleeves and get to work.

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115 *Focused Success in a Distracted World" (Grand Central).*