[**PRODUCTIVITY**](http://www.makeuseof.com/service/productivity/)

**[Rob Nightingale](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/author/robn/" \o "Rob Nightingale)** February 15, 2016 9 minutes

[How to Get a Distraction-Free Computer in 10 Easy Steps](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/get-distraction-free-computer-10-easy-steps/)

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***What [distraction] consumes is rather obvious; it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence, a wealth of [distraction] creates a poverty of attention.***

In the above quote from economist and Turing Prize winner Herbert Simon, the word “distraction” replaces the original word “information”. The sentiment remains the same. If you have a lot of distractions, your attention is necessarily reduced.

This article will show you practical ways to eliminate each of the distractions that your computer is responsible for.

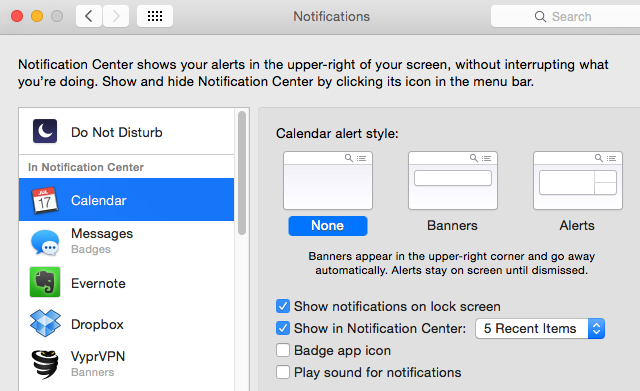
Almost all distractions that our computers throw at us are useless or at best irrelevant at the time they crop up.

Each distraction serves as a trigger. It’s a trigger designed to take you away from what you should be doing, and convincing you to do something else.

Unless you have a good reason not to, it’s far best to remove these distractions (triggers) completely.

**1. Disable Notifications**

Balloon [**notifications popping up**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-distracting-desktop-notifications-turn-windows/) (either in Windows or OS X) are a guaranteed way of stealing your attention, if only for a few seconds.[**5 Distracting Desktop Notifications & How To Turn Them Off [Windows]**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-distracting-desktop-notifications-turn-windows/) [**5 Distracting Desktop Notifications & How To Turn Them Off [Windows]**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-distracting-desktop-notifications-turn-windows/)When you are working on a computer, it takes a fair bit of will power to resist the attempt to multitask. But even if you manage to restrain yourself, many programs manage to throw in...[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-distracting-desktop-notifications-turn-windows/)



To disable these, follow these steps. We’ve already covered [**how to block notifications on your Chromebook**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/effectively-manage-chromebooks-notifications/).

**Windows 10**

Open up the **Action Center** (the icon is on the right hand side of the task bar). Click **All Settings, System**, then **Notifications and Actions**. From this window you’ll be able to toggle your notification settings, including notifications you receive from any installed apps. Disable all those you don’t need.

Within the **Action Center**, you can also manage **Quiet Hours**, which when turned on, restricts notifications to only those you absolutely need.

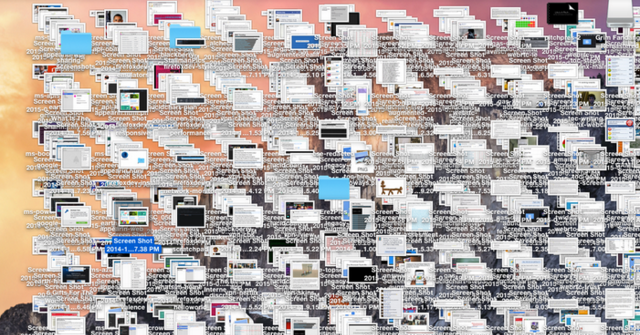
**OS X Yosemite**

Go to **System Preferences**, then **Notifications**. Go through each of the installed apps, and manage the notification setting for each. I highly recommend disabling as many as you can.

Similar to the Quiet Hours feature in Windows, OS X also has a **Do Not Disturb** mode that you can configure in **Notifications**.

**2. Remove Desktop Clutter**

Our very own writer, [**Matt Hughes**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/author/mhughes/) was featured in a [**Motherboard article**](http://motherboard.vice.com/read/i-live-in-a-digital-dumpster-fire) highlighting his dump of a desktop.



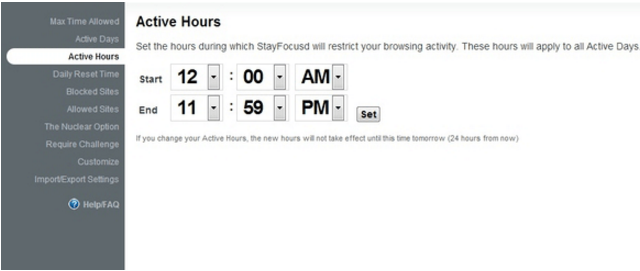
But when your desktop is a screen you see so frequently, it’s far better to have a simple system to keep things clean and organized over there. For most people though, filing away each item on the desktop as and when it arrives is too burdensome.

As for me, I routinely dump all of my desktop items in a folder called “To Sort”, and go through these once every couple of months (most end up getting deleted). If you’re familiar with [***Get Things Done***](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/organise-2015-learn-martial-art-getting-things-done-stuff-watch/)(GTD), this is my version of the “Collection Box”.**[Organise 2015: Learn The Martial Art Of Getting Things Done [Stuff to Watch]](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/organise-2015-learn-martial-art-getting-things-done-stuff-watch/)** **[Organise 2015: Learn The Martial Art Of Getting Things Done [Stuff to Watch]](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/organise-2015-learn-martial-art-getting-things-done-stuff-watch/)**Ever wonder why the successful, over-achievers always seem to keep a cool head?[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/organise-2015-learn-martial-art-getting-things-done-stuff-watch/)

If this isn’t for you, try downloading one of these [**desktop wallpaper organizers**](https://uk.pinterest.com/realia/desktop-organizer-wallpapers/). Each of these allows you to drag and drop your desktop items into different areas of the desktop to keep them in their right place.

**3. Block Distracting Websites**

If you find your attention being captured by certain websites (hello Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, Twitter) when it shouldn’t be, there are [**tools that can block you from certain websites**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/focus-4-best-tools-temporarily-block-facebook-co/) during certain hours.[**Focus! 4 Best Tools To Temporarily Block Facebook & Co**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/focus-4-best-tools-temporarily-block-facebook-co/) [**Focus! 4 Best Tools To Temporarily Block Facebook & Co**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/focus-4-best-tools-temporarily-block-facebook-co/)You're not alone, we have all done it - wasting hours browsing the web instead of getting stuff done. Need a spike in productivity? Find the best tools for escaping social media here.[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/focus-4-best-tools-temporarily-block-facebook-co/)

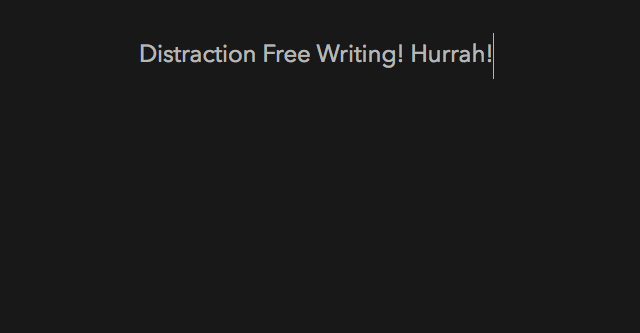


If you use Chrome, install the **[StayFocusd](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/stayfocusd/laankejkbhbdhmipfmgcngdelahlfoji" \t "_blank)** (screenshot above) extension. For Firefox users, download **[Leechblock](https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/leechblock/" \t "_blank)**. For Safari, try **[MindfulBrowsing](https://extensions.apple.com/details/?id=com.mindfulbrowsing.safariextension-XWDSDPD7GS" \t "_blank)**. And if you’re a Windows user and want to block websites (or the entire Internet) on multiple browsers, try **[ColdTurkey](http://getcoldturkey.com/" \t "_blank)**

By using these services, you’ll be able to ensure you can’t be tempted by time-sucking websites until it’s a time suitable for you. Once installed, simply identify the websites you want to block, and input the times during which you’re not allowed to access them. The rest takes care of itself.

**4. Interruption-Free Writing**

Many people report being able to write to a higher standard, if they do so in an uncluttered environment, free of distractions. This environment includes the software in which they are writing.



I find this true in my case, and choose to write in my favorite word processor, **[ByWord (Mac $11.99)](https://itunes.apple.com/app/byword/id420212497" \t "_blank)**(read [**our ByWord review**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/byword-offers-fullscreen-distraction-free-writing-pleasure/)). ByWord shows nothing but the words I’m typing. No icons. No Margins. Just the words.[**Byword Offers Fullscreen Distraction-Free Writing Pleasure On Your Mac**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/byword-offers-fullscreen-distraction-free-writing-pleasure/) [**Byword Offers Fullscreen Distraction-Free Writing Pleasure On Your Mac**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/byword-offers-fullscreen-distraction-free-writing-pleasure/)Taking your pen to hand - or more often keyboard, in these times - is not always a simple undertaking. That's not to say writing is bothersome. No, rather the opposite. Writing is wonderful, awesome,...[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/byword-offers-fullscreen-distraction-free-writing-pleasure/)

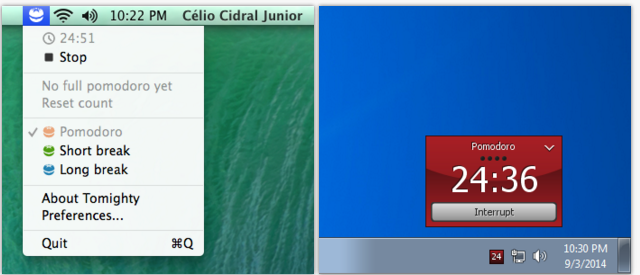
Other options include [**Write!**](https://wri.tt/) (Windows, OS X — Free), **[Ommwriter](http://www.ommwriter.com/" \t "_blank)** (Windows, OS X, iOS — $5) and **[CalmlyWriter](http://www.calmlywriter.com/online/" \t "_blank)** (Chrome — Free or paid).

Each of the word processors mentioned above can also handle [**Markdown**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/markdown-4-reasons-learn-now/) — the simplest, non distracting way to add formatting to your text.

**5. Prevent Procrastination**

[**Despite procrastination resulting in some very profound events**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/procrastination-changed-world/), most of the time, we should [**seek to avoid it**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/stop-procrastinating-new-year-resolution-set/). We’ve already covered blocking distracting websites, but you can install several other tools on your computer to help combat procrastination.[**How Procrastination Changed the World**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/procrastination-changed-world/) [**How Procrastination Changed the World**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/procrastination-changed-world/)We often think of procrastination as an unnecessary hindrance to our everyday lives. But if it weren't for procrastination, the world would be an entirely different place.[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/procrastination-changed-world/)

[**Pomodoro Apps**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/cut-procrastination-pomodoro-technique-apps-software/): by turning on a Pomodoro timer, you’re entering into a contract with yourself to work solidly for 25 minutes. When the alarm goes off, you can reward yourself with a short (timed) break. **[Tomighty](http://www.tomighty.org/" \t "_blank)** (screenshot below) is a free option that works on both Windows and Macs.

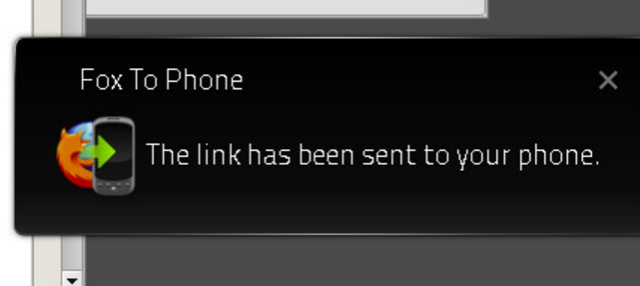


If this isn’t for you, you could use [**Pester**](http://pester.en.softonic.com/mac) (OS X) or [**Nag**](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/nag-multiple-timers-alarms/id391957434?mt=8) (iOS). You can set these apps up to occasionally remind you; “Are you doing what you should be doing…?”, or “Stop procrastinating!”. This is so that when you’re caught procrastinating, you’ve got something to hold you to account.

Unfortunately, we were unable to find something similar for Windows. If you know of anything, let us know in the comments!

**6. Disable Browser Notifications**

Depending on how long you spend within your browser each day, browser notifications can be just as distracting as OS notifications. Receiving those nudges from Facebook, Pinterest, and Product Hunt must be stopped if you want to focus fully on the task at hand.



**Chrome**

To stop push notifications within Google Chrome, click **Settings > Advanced Settings  Content Settings**, then scroll down to **Notifications**. It’s here that you can choose to block *all* website notifications (this will also stop Chrome asking if future sites can send you notifications).

If you still want to allow notifications from a select few websites, click **Manage Exceptions** and select **Block** on those sites you no longer want to receive notifications from.

**Safari**

To stop push notifications in Safari, open the program, then click **Safari > Preferences > Notifications**. Here you can select to allow or deny notifications from certain websites. You can also deselect the option at the bottom of the window, which will stop any more websites asking for your permission to send notifications.

**Firefox**

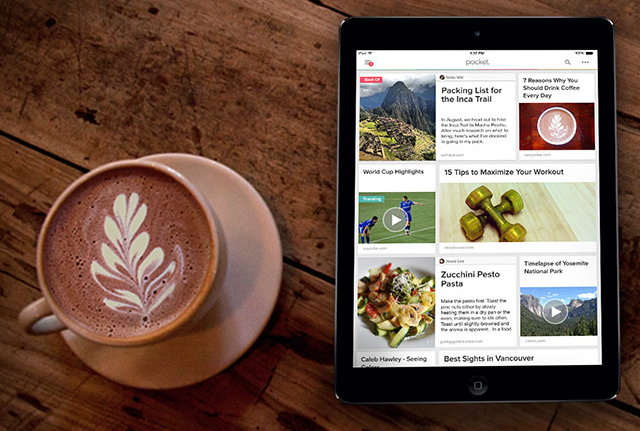
To stop push notifications in Firefox, open Firefox, then go to **Options**, then **Conten***t*. In the **Notifications** area, click **Choose**. This is where you can remove any sites you’ve granted notification permissions to.

If you want to completely disable push notifications from within Firefox, go to **about:config** then search for *dom.webnotifications.enabled*, and set it’s value to FALSE.

**7. Distraction-Free Reading**

You know when you leave a ton of tabs open for later reading? That’s distracting enough. Then when you get around to actually reading those sites, the pages themselves are full of distractions, from weird formatting, to pop-up ads.

To save yourself from both of these distractions, sign up to either [**Pocket**](https://getpocket.com/) or **[Instapaper](https://www.instapaper.com/u" \t "_blank)**. Then, download their extension for whichever browser you use.

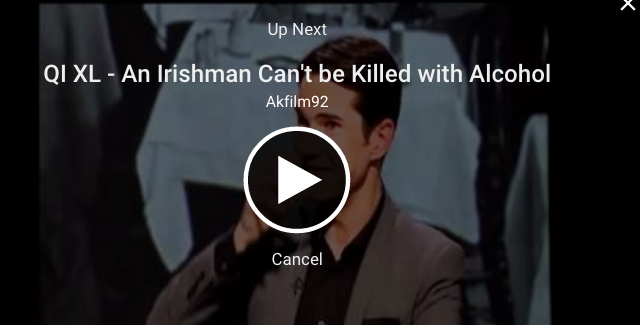


With the click of a button, you’re now able to save the text on a page and close the tab. When you do get around to reading that content at your own convenience, you’ll be pleased to see it’s formatted with less distractions than were on the original web page.

Aside from simply being reading apps, the [**features of Pocket**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/pocket-gets-smarter-with-highlights-a-redesigned-interface-more-features/) and [**those of Instapaper**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/become-instapaper-power-user-6-cool-features/) make for an enhanced, less distracting reader experience than a browser can offer.[**Become an Instapaper Power User With These 6 Cool Features**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/become-instapaper-power-user-6-cool-features/) [**Become an Instapaper Power User With These 6 Cool Features**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/become-instapaper-power-user-6-cool-features/)Despite an impressive adoption rate, a plethora of Instapaper features often remain unexplored. Let’s take a look at a few of them.[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/become-instapaper-power-user-6-cool-features/)

**8. Stop Autoplay**

If you catch yourself watching a YouTube video or a show on Netflix, their feature which autoplays another video or next episode can be a huge time-suck.



**Netflix**

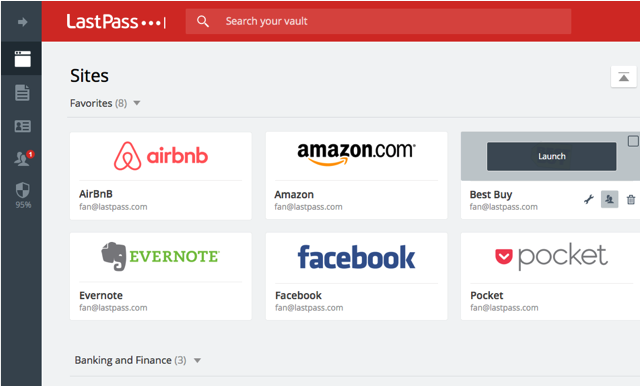
To deactivate this autoplay feature on Netflix, sign in to your account, then head over to **My Account**, click **Playback Settings**, then deselect the **autoplay** box.

**YouTube**

After a backlash from users, YouTube made it very easy to turn off their autoplay feature. When you’re next watching a video, take a look at the top of the **Up Next** list on the right side of the page. There’s a little toggle button up there titled **Autoplay**. Switch this to off mode, and no more videos will start playing of their own accord.

**9. Stop Forgetting Passwords**

If you’re in the middle of a task and find yourself needing to log into another service, but forgot your password, the whole process of resetting your account can take you far from the task at hand. To prevent this happening in the future, there are a couple of options.



First, you could use a service like **[LastPass](https://lastpass.com/getlastpass.php?mcomb=s6bicEn7W|88915076165|lastpass%20premium|e|i8rbbhb5l0|c&gclid=CIKikZfz4MoCFSoKwwodnuQLpQ" \t "_blank)** ([**our LastPass write-up**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/lastpass-premium-treat-password-management-rewards/)) or **[Dashland](https://www.dashlane.com/" \t "_blank)** ([**our Dashland write-up**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/dashlane-slick-password-manager-form-filler-online-shopping-assistant/)). These are two leading password management services that help you generate secure passwords. They then securely store these for you, so you never have to remember them yourself.[**LastPass Premium: Treat Yourself To The Best Password Management Ever [Rewards]**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/lastpass-premium-treat-password-management-rewards/) **[LastPass Premium: Treat Yourself To The Best Password Management Ever [Rewards]](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/lastpass-premium-treat-password-management-rewards/)**If you've never heard of LastPass, I'm sorry to say that you have been living under a rock. However, you are reading this article, so you've already made a step in the right direction. LastPass...[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/lastpass-premium-treat-password-management-rewards/)

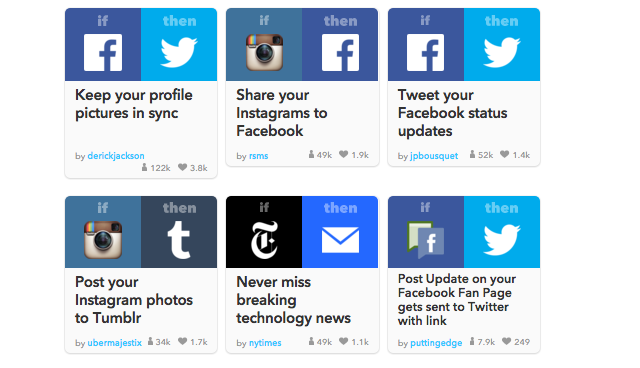
Second, you could use the arguably less secure method of having your own password system that you can rely on. For example, you could choose a standard password such as Passio135^. This password is then edited based on your own criteria. I.e. add the first letter of the website at the front of the password in lowercase, and the second letter of the website at the end of the password in uppercase. In this case, if you were signing up to Netflix, the password would be nPassio135E. This ensures you can figure out each of your passwords, but if someone figures out your system, you could be in trouble.

**10. Automate Small Tasks**

Each week, tons of small tasks will occasionally steal your attention. Just imagine if these could be automated? I’m talking things like:

* Saving your favorite blogs to a read later app.
* Backing up photos to Dropbox or Flickr.
* Going back and saving your favorite tweets to read later.
* Scouring Reddit for top posts.
* Constantly checking CraisgList for the same things.
* Tracking prices on eBay.

If you can think of even just a couple of small tasks like these, which take up some of your attention, you should sign up to [**IFTTT**](https://ifttt.com/) (which stands for If This Then That).



Our [**IFTTT guide**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/the-ultimate-ifttt-guide-use-the-webs-most-powerful-tool-like-a-pro/) will take you through everything you need to know. Basically, this is a service that can connect different services you use. It can then automatically perform certain functions that you give it permission to do. It’s an incredible time and energy saver if you use it in the right way.[**The Ultimate IFTTT Guide: Use The Web's Most Powerful Tool Like A Pro**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/the-ultimate-ifttt-guide-use-the-webs-most-powerful-tool-like-a-pro/) [**The Ultimate IFTTT Guide: Use The Web's Most Powerful Tool Like A Pro**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/the-ultimate-ifttt-guide-use-the-webs-most-powerful-tool-like-a-pro/)IFTTT is an automation that will enable you to connect 2 services so that, when something happens with one service, a trigger goes off and an action takes place automatically on the other.[**READ MORE**](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/the-ultimate-ifttt-guide-use-the-webs-most-powerful-tool-like-a-pro/)

**Keeping on Top of Things**

Each of these sections covers a general distraction that almost all of us face on a daily basis. By minimizing (and eliminating where possible) you can maximize the attention you can invest into more important tasks.

You may still have certain computer habits that mean you will always have *some* distraction. In these cases, be sure to keep a close eye on those distractions to make sure they don’t get out of hand.

Even so, by keeping on top of most, if not all, of the distractions mentioned above, you’ll most definitely be able to carve out longer chunks of time where you’re not bombarded with push notifications, alerts, and messages.

**Over to you: which other computer distractions do you suffer from that we didn’t cover here? And if implemented, which of the above tips would help you the most right now?**

Image Credits: Fox To Phone, Firefox 4, and KDE by samat k jain (Flickr)

**4 COMMENTSWRITE A COMMENT**

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[Rob Nightingale](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/author/robn)**230** articles

Rob Nightingale has a degree in Philosophy from the University of York, UK. He has worked as a social media manager and consultant for over five years, while giving workshops in several countries. For the past two years, Rob has also been a technology writer, and is MakeUseOf's Social Media…

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