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How I quit social media

Earlier this year I quit social media. I would recommend trying it.

Just to keep things clear, I consider social media to be any service where you're presenting yourself using your real name. I don't think sites like Reddit count. Also, I don't really count sites that have a social element that are for professional development or some other purpose like LinkedIn (though I did get rid of my LinkedIn account) or Github/Dribbble.

My motivation

In short: I was sick of nonstop posts about politics, I realized that I was very negative on it, and it often made me feel like I wasn't living a good enough life.

The reasons are going to be different for every person and it doesn't ultimately matter. The big thing for me is *how* I did it, and what my life is like today with no social media.

I didn't wake up one day and say "I'm done with all social media!" It was actually a slower process that begun with me just trying to clean up the multitude of accounts I had floating around. The whole process took about 6 months and I did it in a series of steps.

Starting at the edges

I realized I had a Snapchat that I pretty much never used. Maybe once or twice a month I would get a snap from somebody. Instagram I was a little more active on and I liked that I had a grid of photos from specific memories in my life, but those were easily backed up. It was easy to remove a lot of peripheral apps like that.

Closer to home

Then I started evaluating my relationships with services I used every day. I had a Twitter account with hundreds of followers. People I'd met professionally, people I knew from doing standup, regular friends who just happened to have an account, etc... Twitter was by far my most heavily used social media. I took pride in how unfiltered I was on there. But Twitter was one of the first Google results for my name. How many potential opportunities did I pass up because of that? If you had asked me then, I would have said I didn't care. But the truth is somewhere in-between. I don't ever want to work somewhere or have a relationship where I feel like I can't be myself, but I also now recognize and acknowledge that there are different levels of sharing in relationships and it's not the worst thing in the world to have a little restraint.

I also realized how negative I was on there. Twitter was my favorite place to go on a rant and read things to get upset about. I don't think I was a very fun follow. I was also obsessed with my follower count. I feel like on Twitter, everybody is trying to be a somebody. And there is that ridiculous blue check mark system, as if having one makes you a more valid person. Twitter encouraged some of my worst social media habits and getting rid of it was the first thing that really stung. But Twitter didn't affect my real social life. The biggest battle was to come.

The big one: Facebook

Finally I was down to the big scary one: Facebook. Of all of the accounts I got rid of, Facebook was the only one that deleting actually had an effect on my life in real ways. That's kind of scary and dystopian, but it's so ubiquitous that I almost can't blame apps and services for connecting to it. For a long time even Tinder didn't let you use its service without a Facebook account, though that's no longer the case (stoked to be able to match with people again and be too timid to message them!)

The weirdest/craziest side effect of this was when a friend of mine that lived out of state who I only was connected with through social media noticed that I wasn't on Facebook anymore, checked and saw I had deleted all my social media and was worried I was suicidal. Getting a text message from a worried friend on a Friday night thinking I'm on the edge when I was actually just out to dinner with some friends was really jarring.

But aside from all of that, when I looked at how I actually *used* Facebook day to day. There was some value there: Messenger was a fairly valuable tool to be able to talk to people I wasn't as close to, so was getting event invites. But the day to day deluge of status updates, the constant bragging and attention seeking (that I was also a part of) made it not worth it. I wasn't using Facebook in a healthy way and it was making my life worse. So I got rid of it.

Tips

Check your motivations. Do you actually want to be done with these services? Is this a change you could actually commit to?

Definitely start slow. Any big sweeping change is likely to be so jarring you will revert back and not really change at all.

I regret not communicating more that I was doing this. You don't need to post a big dramatic Facebook status, but it might be worth it to let people in your life know you are doing it.

What it's like now

As of this writing it's been about 6-7 months since I've had any social media. Now that I am "detoxed", I really prefer it. I put active effort into maintaining friendships and most of all, I am not trying to impress anybody anymore. I live my life, I try to treat other people well and expect the same in return. I still get invited to stuff, though less often I think. The coolest thing for me is the friendships I've developed *after* Facebook. I love really getting to know someone just based off the things they tell me. I can't go on and see everything they've said and thought since they were in middle school.

Another really interesting thing I've noticed is how little social media or the things that happen on it are discussed in real life. It never gets mentioned with friends or in group texts. **It's like this whole meta thing that doesn't really exist.**

There have been a lot of doom and gloom predictions about social media in popular media. Kudos to you if you recognize the Black Mirror episode that is the header image for this blog post. It basically depicts a world where everybody has a social media account and their ability to participate in society is intrinsically linked to their popularity on the service. There is a underlined funnier take on the same concept in the show Community.

I don't really think we are headed towards something like that. Really, I don't think that social media is *inherently* good or bad. I think social media is something that can make life better if you are using it intentionally and have really considered its role in your life. For me, I ultimately decided it was a complication I didn't need and my life is more peaceful without it.

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