

6

TIPS FOR A SIMPLER, SMARTER DIGITAL LIFE

**A SIMPLE GUIDE THAT
WILL SAVE YOU TIME,
DECREASE STRESS AND
HELP YOU LEAN IN TO
THE LIFE YOU ALWAYS
WANTED**



Mike St. Pierre

www.speakdigital.org
SIMPLIFYING YOUR DIGITAL LIFE

preface

Thanks for joining the Speak Digital Network and for reading this eBook. You've taken the first step towards something very exciting! A simpler, more fulfilling life- doesn't that sound great? To get you started, I've prepared this short book just for you.

This eBook offers a framework for simplifying your digital life. With email, social media and the increasing demands of today's world of work, each of us can benefit from a leaner, more streamlined approach to everyday life. Read it and put it to work. *Leave what's not useful and share what is.* If you find something that can be better, please let me know via email: mike@speakdigital.org. Again, thanks for reading!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, MIKE ST. PIERRE

I'm a regular guy from New Jersey. One amazing wife and four terrific kids. We live in northern New Jersey and have lived on the East Coast for the past 16 years. I lead a Catholic high school and am a doctoral candidate studying technology and its impact on schools. I like diners, mountain biking and hanging out with good friends. I fish but not very well.

If you'd like my corporate bio, [click here](#).

Why did I write this eBook? Basically, I had to. After living a hectic, fast-paced life for all of my adult life, I had to find a simpler, more effective way to live. I got tired of working all week, only to face more work around the house all weekend. I also found technology, as much as I love it, to be exhausting! As someone who is passionate about self improvement, I'm always looking for a little edge or technique that can help me get more done in less time. If I can find a faster way to make coffee, I'm in. Easier way to mow the lawn? I'm interested.

"I got tired of working all week, only to face more work around the house all weekend."

The result of my quest is curated on my website (www.speakdigital.org). I write several times every week, [post videos on YouTube](#) and have a popular podcast called [Techspiration](#).



So let's go! Enjoy this eBook and let me know how you are putting its tips into practice. I'd love to hear from you! You can email me anytime: mike@speakdigital.org.

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“Simplicity slows down life and frees us from this modern hysteria to live faster. It finds freedom to disengage.”

Joshua Becker, *Inside-Out Simplicity*

the state of digital living

My Car Isn't Like it Used to Be

Enter the Toyota Sienna, purchased in 2014. A nice red color with lots of bells and whistles. Two power sliding doors and something like 20 cup holders. That's a lot of drinks. The car rides so nice on the highway and served us well on a recent trip from Jersey to Florida. Unfortunately, one small engine repair led our mechanic to level with us and explain that today's cars just aren't the same as a generation ago. So many computers in the car have led them to become more sophisticated and indeed, more digital. The consequence is that fewer people change their own oil and there's now a premium on those people who can navigate the digital world with ease. Digital has married my Sienna and I suspect it's dated your car too.

Church Has Become Boring

A car is one thing but church, now that's another. My kids, all four of them, have declared at one time or another that they feel that church is boring. It could be the mediocre music or the fact that their online "worlds" are so much more interesting than their church environment. Online, you have tons of friends, you can measure your influence and you can walk away anytime you like. *Church though, that's different.*

Digital may not have infiltrated church but it's certainly impacting those that go to church.

She's Distracted Even When She's With her Family

Ever seen this? A mom is at the park with her kids, checking her phone while the little ones are swinging and playing tag? So many folks are plain old distracted by technology that even when they are around those that they love the most, they're thinking of other things, often related to life online.

I Want to Live a Simpler, Smarter Digital Life

So let's boil it down to one simple truth- most of us want to live a simpler life and one that includes our digital life. I want that. My family wants that. How about you? This eBook will

The Data Is In

- 78% of teens own cell phones
- 23% of teens own tablet computers
- 93% of teens have a computer or have access to one at home

Source: Pew Research Internet Project Report, 2013 ([link](#))

provide you with a toolbox that offers six tips for a simpler and more peaceful life. We won't leave the technology behind but I will argue for more moderation, more pausing and less "addiction" to digital.

Let's Define Some Terms

When we say "digital" we mean anything that has a computer in it. Not your mailbox. Not your yard rake. Smartphones, TV's, cars, laptops, iPads... put all of those in a box and they each qualify as digital. We're also referring to the spaces that call out your name online such as social media and email. It's all noise and to be honest, some of it is good noise. When my wife texts me, sure it's noise but it's a good kind of disruption. When a spammer sends me an email and it throws me off my game, that's not helpful.

That's bad noise. Unfortunately, it's become harder and harder to distinguish between the good and the bad.

That's why this eBook is helpful. Practice the six tips that we're about to discuss and you'll achieve *ninja status* when it comes to your digital life. A big promise? Try them out and let me know what difference it makes. First though, let's take inventory.

taking inventory

How Much "Digital" is In Your Life?

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of living a simpler, saner digital life, let's pause. Take a look around. Look at your home and wherever you work. For some of you, that may be the same place or you might be like me and have a commute. If I'm honest, I need to do this too on a regular basis or the glowing devices will take over (sort of like the legos that my boys have literally all over their room!).

Here are some questions to help with the inventory:

1. How many TV's do you own? _____
2. Do you have a regular cell phone or a smartphone? _____

Alone Together?

“Technology challenges us to assert our human values, which means that first of all, we have to figure out what they are.”

Source: Sherry Turkle, Author of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*, 2013 ([link](#))

3. How many computers do you own? _____
 4. When was the last time that your home was totally silent? _____
 5. Do you find it difficult to spend time in silence? (yes/no) _____
 6. On your way to work, what do you most often listen to? (i.e. radio, talk shows, podcasts)

 7. If you are a church-goer, do you find that it takes a few minutes to truly slow down? _____
 8. Place a check next to each social media platform that you currently participate in:
 - Twitter _____
 - Google Plus _____
 - Pinterest _____
 - Instagram _____
 - Facebook _____
 - LinkedIn _____
 - Vine _____
 - Other _____
 9. Do you have so many logins that you have trouble keeping track of them all? _____
 10. Based on questions 1-9, describe the level of digital that exists in your life:
-

Ok now stop. This activity is designed to accomplish two things:

- 1. Help you "clear the decks" and do a mental inventory of how much digital is present in your life.**
- 2. Give you an excuse to cut back. If you're feeling a little overwhelmed, that's ok.**

Any inventory of this kind is difficult to say the least. When I first went through it, I realized that *my head was way more cluttered* than I wanted it to be. I began to make choices. More email and less Pinterest. More LinkedIn and less Instagram. Each person's choices are different and that's ok. It's about finding what "simple" is for you and then acting accordingly. There are few right answers in this journey.

What's So Bad About an Overly Digital Life?

You might be wondering what the big deal is about an overly digital life and I don't blame you. It's not that we want to live a spartan lifestyle without power or the niceties of a decent smartphone or cable TV. No, that's not on my hot list. What is interesting from a goodly

number of people is the concept that you can "tame" your digital life so that it fits into how you want to live. To me, there are at least five negative effects of living an overly digital life:

- An overly digital life numbs us to in-person conversations. If I'm more tempted to simply email you, I'm less likely to pick up the phone or stop by your house. That's not good.
- An overly digital life creates more noise than we can humanly bear. If you really tried to keep up with every Tweet, Update or Pin, it might make you delirious. Give yourself a break.
- An overly digital life causes distraction. Think of that mom who is on her phone and hitting the curb at the same time in her SUV. Too much digital and you can lose your way.
- An overly digital life makes spirituality more difficult. I'm not saying that God can't speak to you through an email or blog post. What I am suggesting is that too much digital can make talking to God more difficult.
- An overly digital life could hold your career back. Ask anyone who has landed a great job and they'll tell you that it was either a strong network or clever timing that opened the door for them to interview and then land the job. It wasn't the font in their text message or the number of Facebook updates they posted last week. It's about people. Relationships matter.

What Can You Expect from the Six Tips?

What I'm about to share with you isn't rocket science. It is, however, a proven set of habits that will help you to simplify your digital life. I use them almost daily and my friends and family tell me that they've made a difference. I've heard from others that they use the habits as well and that they've made a difference. Ready? Let's dive right in.

the six tips

1. Don't Check Email First Thing in the Morning

Email is useful for certain purposes. The problem is that most people have their notifications on so that their computer chimes each time an email comes in. When we then respond to each

email as it pops it, our day gets sabotaged and we lose focus, only to return to other work with less vigor and purpose. Second, email can take up your entire day if you let it. My recommendation is simple enough- don't check email to start your day and *only check it* a few times during the day. Why give over the most valuable hours of your day (typically in the morning) to someone else via email?

2. Cultivate non-Digital Environments and Moments

So the story is told of a young man who gives his entire day over to Twitter and Facebook. It's a process of interacting with friends from high school and a neighbor that has a new car. The only problem is that much of life is relational and lived best when "in person". When the young man takes a walk on the beach, he's suddenly more interested in checking Facebook than in enjoying the sand underneath his feet. He misses what's right in front of him (which is an amazing sunset on any given day). Cultivate non-digital moments in your day. For me, this means beginning the day with a Bible and a journal. A good cup of coffee is pretty helpful too.

3. Eliminate Digital Clutter

How many emails do you have? How many do you need? A few years ago my wife, Cary decided that her best effort at email was to declare "email bankruptcy" and just delete everything in her inbox. It had just gotten out of control. You might want to do the same. Or, you may want to use only two emails- one for work and one for personal use. I like a service like [SaneLater](#) which filters out newsletters and ads so that they only get into my inbox if I specifically teach it to do so. Whatever works for you... the key is to prune out any digital clutter that you can. You can do it!

4. Use a Digital Task Manager

I know, I know, there are folks who love paper and an old fashioned lined pad of paper. The truth is that I'm one of those folks and use a black notebook each day. But... it's those darned projects that cause problems. A project is often defined as an action that requires multiple steps. Paint the kitchen? *Project*. Buy dog-food? *Project*. Research that Caribbean vacation you've been thinking about? *Project*. And on and on it goes. I recommend using a digital task manager to keep stock of all of the projects you have in your head. There are countless apps that you can use. Two that work well for me are [Nozbe](#) and [Todoist](#). Find one that works for you and is fun to use and then go to town, emptying all of your projects into it.

5. Use a Password Manager

Did you know that a majority of people use very predictable passwords? Whether it's *qwerty* or *abcdefg*, your personal data and digital identity are too important to allow someone else to

steal. Try something like [LastPass](#) or [1Password](#). Either will do the trick of managing your many, many logins and passwords. You probably have more than you realize.

6. Empty Your Inbox Twice a Week

Here comes some "productivity heresy": empty your inbox twice a week. Sure, it's better to clean it down to zero each day but let's be honest, I think I've met like three people on the planet who have that kind of productivity! Why twice? Well, it's better than not at all and it's probably just enough to keep your work moving forward without losing anything. Try it. It may be the most spiritual thing you do all week. No joke.

conclusion

So you've made it! **The six tips you just studied are sure-fire ways to simplify your digital life.** You'll need a lot of practice and a little bit of discipline. The good news is that a mountain of digital is staring you down right now. Now, the invitation is yours as you look up at the mountain- will you simplify? Will you have the courage to streamline your digital life? I've got great news- *you can do it!*

thank you!

I hope you've enjoyed this eBook as much as I loved preparing it for you. I can't thank you enough for your participation in the Speak Digital Network and everything I do.

If you haven't already, you can follow me on Twitter ([@thedailysaint](#)), and join in on the conversations going on right now on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) pages.

Thanks again and all the best!



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