



## Competing with the Internet for Employees' Time? How to Keep Your Productivity Edge

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A 2014 survey by Robert Half Management Resources finds nearly one-third of executives surveyed think non-business-related Internet use, including use of social media, is the greatest time-waster at work.

Next on the survey's list was chatting with coworkers (27 percent of respondents) and then, attending meetings.

Each time I have to fax something by hand or mail an actual letter, I appreciate how the Internet has improved productivity. However, I simply have to look at my own smart phone to understand the thousands of distractions that await me ... from entertaining games and videos (who doesn't think ten kittens chasing a red dot from a laser pointer isn't cute?) ... to a constant stream of texts to and from family and friends.

So, have we reached a tipping point where the personal distractions of the Internet surpass its value as a time-saving tool?

Work distractions are not new. Before the Internet, employers tried to limit personal landline phone calls and small talk around the water cooler, which, according to the survey, is still a concern.

The problem with the Internet and hurting productivity is that the Internet has added to the number of distractions for employees and has made it easier for digression without management's knowledge.

So, here are some thoughts about keeping the Internet as a tool and limiting it as an employee distraction.

If you're thinking that eliminating smart devices at work is how to solve the problem ... it won't. Like the speed limit, any such rule would be broken (quickly and often), and it is out-of-step with employee and applicant expectations of the modern workplace. Instead, allow personal devices, but restrict use to personal use on break time or in case of an emergency.

In addition, require that employees only use employer equipment, systems, and software, including workplace email, for work. This helps productivity, but will also help maintain security and preserve bandwidth.

Provide notice in your handbook that you plan to monitor Internet usage on your system and that you prohibit certain types of use, like visiting pornography and hate sites and committing sexual or other types of illegal harassment. Also, provide notice that if the employee uses your system or your equipment for personal communications or other personal use, there is no expectation of privacy.

If your system allows, consider an extra step and restrict use of certain sites that are not work-related like certain social media and retail sites. Also, consider eliminating use of devices during meetings unless the device is needed to conduct the meeting.

Next, train your employees on proper Internet usage. This is important for preventing cybercrimes, but also for maintaining productivity.

Finally, after you establish all the policies and procedures, you have to enforce your rules and answer this question:

*If my employees have the time to watch kittens chasing a laser pointer, do they have enough to do or are they disengaged?*

Your answer will dictate what your next step should be.

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