

Unsubscribe yourself

Every time I look at my phone to check my email or update my social media, I feel like I am on an expedition on the Amazon. Not only because I do most of my shopping on said online retailer, but because I have to make my way through a treacherous jungle just to bestow myself and others a moment or two of joy or intellectual engagement. There are photographs and news worth sharing, but they cannot be accessed without passing through murky waters and breaking through the distracting cacophony of voices begging for your attention. Navigating this journey can be exhausting, but, with a little bit of virtual landscaping, it doesn't have to be.

The average office worker receives 90 emails a day, 40 of which are relevant. If you're anything like me, every time you check your email you are bombarded with demands for your attention and more often than not, it's by someone who is after your money. I receive constant news updates and event notifications from faraway charities which I had only intended to make a one-time donation to in support of a friend or family member. I receive at least three advertisements a day for the stores where I purchase my children's fall and spring wardrobes. Often friendly greetings from distant relatives, birthday party e-vites, and sports schedules get buried under the avalanche.

My social media accounts aren't much better. I am "friends" with people I haven't seen since I was a full-time student. While it's nice to keep up with people who shared a chapter of my life, sometimes I am disappointed when I discover that someone whose company I once enjoyed has chosen to live a life of negativity and disrespect to themselves and/or others. When I see excessive and unnecessary complaining, inappropriate images and offensive commentary, I realize that this person is not someone I would want to spend time with in real life.

The good news is that I don't have to be subjected to the things that make me feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable in my virtual life. I can click on the "unsubscribe" link on the bottom of a junk email or "block" disrespectful people on Facebook. I also choose to opt out of emails when I make one-time online donations or purchases so that I am spared the barrage of advertisements. (I can always find a discount coupon in a Google search when I actually do need to buy something.)

When you get rid of the junk in your inbox and in your life, you are able to focus on what really matters. Your real life deserves the same treatment. It may not be as simple as the click of a mouse, but you can close doors on people, places, and things that keep you from being the best version of yourself or distance you from God.

Though I have many friends who don't share my beliefs, I have cut ties with people for making racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, and otherwise xenophobic comments. I have no problem saying, "Hate has no place in my world, nor in the one we all share. Whenever I can choose to shut it out, I will." Sometimes I try to educate the person, but there are times when "unsubscribing" from them is the only option.

It can even be simpler. Say you want to eat healthier, but every time you go to the gas station, you load up on chips, candy, and soda. Habits are tough to break, but if the trigger here is a particular gas station that has your favorite snacks, unsubscribe from it! Choose a new place to go, one without a treasure trove of junk food, if possible.

One controversial thing that I have unsubscribed from is TV news. I used to have cable news on round the clock, then switch back to local news at the designated times. Over time, I discovered that constant exposure to the tragedies happening in the world did not benefit me. I became anxious and obsessed that something terrible was going to happen to one of my loved ones at any moment. Eventually, I had to unsubscribe from my news addiction. Now, I periodically Google news issues that are important to me and, of course, keep up with The Catholic Review.

When you "subscribe" to something, you are making the promise to keep showing up for more of whatever is being offered. When you decide to stop subscribing to things that really don't matter to you or make you feel excessive negative emotions, you are opening yourself to bigger, better, and in many cases, more uplifting ways to spend your time online. (And if you haven't already, please subscribe to my blog so that I can send more joy and enlightenment your way.)