

Samsung woes show how dependent we've become on smartphones

October 11 2016, by Barbara Ortutay



In this Friday, Sept. 2, 2016, file photo, a woman walks by an advertisement of the Samsung Electronics Galaxy Note 7 smartphone at the company's showroom in Seoul, South Korea. Samsung is asking owners of its fire-prone Galaxy Note 7 to do something crazy: "power down and stop using the device." This is all but unthinkable in an age where smartphones have become an extra limb, the last thing we look at before falling asleep and the first thing we grab in the morning, not to mention throughout the day. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon, File)

Tethered as we are to our smartphones, Samsung asking users of its fire-prone Galaxy Note 7 to "power down and stop using the device" is not

just an inconvenience. It's crazy.

Smartphones have become extensions of ourselves, the last thing we look at before falling asleep and the first thing we grab in the morning. Abandoning them is all but unthinkable, even at the dinner table, even on the toilet.

Risking a battery fire might seem like a small price to pay for obsessively checking your latest Instagram "likes," catching up on email, Skyping your grandkids across the country, getting directions, confirming your travel itinerary, reading the news, searching for a dinner recipe, hailing a ride and so on.

For those traveling with children, a long flight without a smartphone to serve as distraction is akin to torture.

Power down and stop using the device? You might as well go live in a cave in a distant mountain (if you can get there, since you no longer have GPS). According to the Pew Research Center, 43 percent of the world's population uses a smartphone. Rates are highest in places such as South Korea (88 percent), Australia (77 percent) and Israel (74 percent).

And use it they do. We check Facebook so often that the company no longer just measures its users on a monthly basis. A more important number is how many people check in on a daily basis. In June, more than 1 billion people checked Facebook on a mobile device at least once a day.

In a report on global mobile device usage, the consulting firm Deloitte found the obvious, namely that "device obsession is deepening" and that people are using their phones for "everything from watching TV to simply crossing the road." Some of us even use the phones while crossing the road, which is not the safest thing in the world.

A small 2015 study by Nottingham Trent University that tracked 18- to 33-year-olds found that they checked their phones an average of 85 times a day—often without realizing.

Entire industries have sprung up to try to pry us away from our gadgets, such as phone-free summer camps for adults, anti-texting-and-driving apps and apps that track how much time you spend on your phone.



In this Monday, Oct. 10, 2016, file photo, South Korean high school students try out Samsung Electronics Galaxy Note 7 smartphones at the company's shop in Seoul in Seoul, South Korea. Samsung is asking owners of its fire-prone Galaxy Note 7 to do something crazy: "power down and stop using the device." This is all but unthinkable in an age where smartphones have become an extra limb, the last thing we look at before falling asleep and the first thing we grab in the morning, not to mention throughout the day. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon, File)

As such, it's not surprising that smartphone owners suddenly deprived of this extra limb are finding ways around the inconvenience.

"I am currently using my tablet that has AT&T number sync. I have a Bluetooth headset connected that allows me to make and receive calls. It also can receive texts, but it works marginal at best," said Leo Langelier III, who lives in North Berwick, Maine.

His Note 7—the replacement model—started to emit smoke in the car while he was traveling with his family. While his family is fine, he has not been able to get a replacement and said he will be reactivating an older phone he has at home until he can get everything cleared up.

Adam Siemaszko, who returned his Note 7 to a Best Buy in Manhattan, said a co-worker was kind enough to lend him an old iPhone 5S until I can get a new one. He decided to get the new Pixel phone from Google, as he's lost his trust in Samsung. But there's a five- to six-week wait.

"Being phoneless is awful," he said. "What I don't think a lot of people think about is just how reliant we have been with the modern flagships."

Siemaszko said he got used to taking notes on the Note 7 using its special S pen and running two apps side by side at once. The iPhone 5S came out in 2013 and even the latest iPhone, the 7, lacks these options.

"I feel incredibly limited on this 5S," he said. "They took my tool away, and the only way to get something else is to jump through hoops."

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