

How To Block Social Sites For Your Own Damn Good

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Image credit: Sam Woolley

By habit, the first letters I bang onto my keyboard every morning are usually “t-w-i-t” before I catch myself. Muscle memory is a bitch, and sometimes the only way to stop a habit is to stop receiving its reward. That’s where a site blocker comes into play. Free extensions like [StayFocusd](#) and [WasteNoTime](#) work with your web browser of choice and allow you to block sites that you might deem distracting or unhealthy.

You can block sites by the time of day, time spent browsing, or cut them out of your work week altogether. On days where I wanted to avoid tweeting, allocating a few minutes per day to my list of distracted sites let me stay up on news while keeping me from whittling away the rest of my week. After 10 minutes or so, the StayFocusd extension would refresh my distracting site of choice and replace it with a helpful message: “Shouldn’t you be working right now?” Inspiring.

If you want to see exactly how long you’ve been staring at that GIF of a dog licking a churro on Twitter, time-tracking app [Rescuetime](#) will track the time you waste spend on sites and inside apps. It’s free, but for \$9 per month you can access more detailed reports and block sites for set periods of time. It even features a one-click “offline” mode that blocks any Internet access for a set period.

Router Filters

Chrome extensions don’t work on mobile devices like iPhones or tablets, so blocking social sites gets a bit more complicated. Luckily you can cut them off at the pass by preventing them from even accessing your devices by customizing your domain name server. Usually provided by your ISP, domain name servers translate site URLs like [lifehacker.com](#) into IP addresses, which then lets you access the site in question. Services like [DNSFilter](#) and [OpenDNS](#) (a confusingly-named closed-source service from Cisco) give you more control over what can and can’t get through your network thanks to filtering capabilities.

You can block sites by category or specify which sites in particular you'd like to deny access to your browser. That means you and anyone on your network won't be able to access blocked sites, so make sure you check with your roommates or partner before you start fiddling with the network settings.

OpenDNS offers a free version of its service for filtering, but you can pay \$19.95 for a year of more granular control and a record of your Internet logs. DNSFilter charges \$5 per month, per network.

App Blockers

I know it's played out to say "there's an app for that," but if you're looking for an app on your phone to stop wasting time on your phone, well...yeah. You won't need to modify your router settings but you will probably have to pony up some dough if you're using a service like [Freedom](#). It works on PCs and Macs as well as iOS devices (an Android app is in development) and creates a VPN-like service that, while refraining from connecting to an outside service, is able to block content from your device. You can schedule blocked time, activate it on the fly, and sync your blocked sites with your devices. Freedom's monthly plan starts at \$6.99, though you can snag a yearly plan for an annual \$29 subscription.