

Produced in Native





A Call to Minimize Distraction & Respect Users' Attention

By a concerned PM & entrepreneur
[go/distraction](#)

UPDATE 8/12/15: [go/post-distraction](#)

UPDATE 2/1/15: [Watch TED talk](#)

UPDATE 4/2/15: [Watch Wisdom 2.0 talk](#)

I'm concerned about how we're
making the world **more distracted**

And my goal with this presentation
is to **create a movement** at Google...

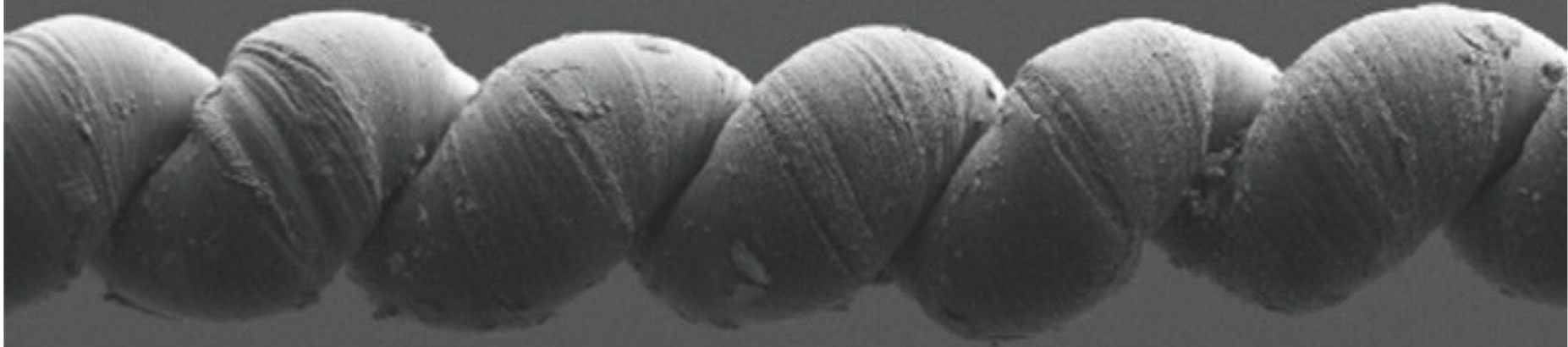
... to create a new design ethic that
aims to **minimize distraction**

and I'd like to
get your help.

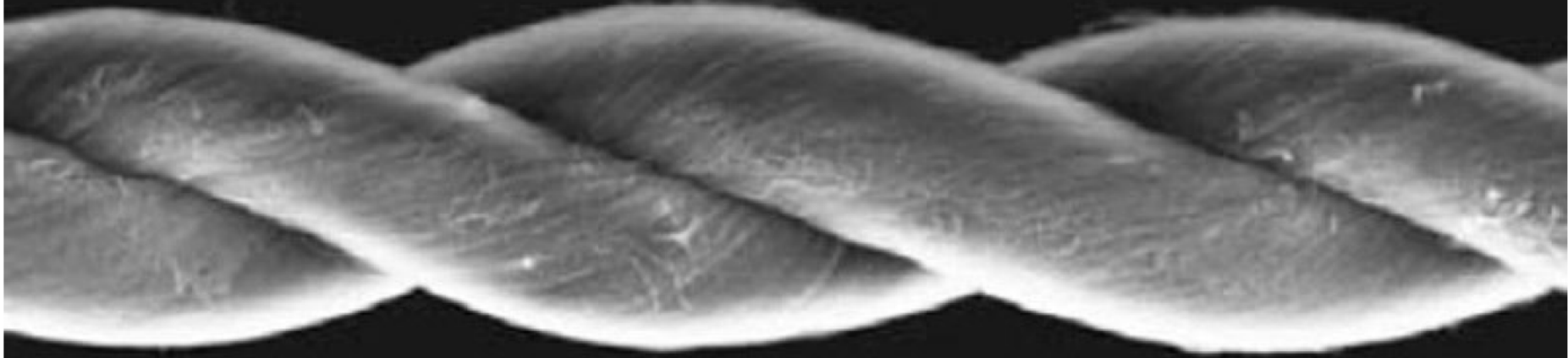




**Time matters
because
time is all we have
in life...**



... time is expanded and contracted when
we're in flow vs. distracted.



You've experienced
this before...

A vibrant tropical seascape with turquoise water, distant islands, and a bright yellow kayak in the foreground. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, the bow of a bright yellow kayak is visible, with a yellow paddle resting inside. The water is a clear, deep turquoise. In the distance, several dark, forested islands are visible on the horizon. A few small boats can be seen further out. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a remote tropical location.

More can happen in a
single day traveling in a
remote country, than in
months of your work life.



Or in one hour
of dancing...



SEARCH MAIL

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1 - 15 of 15



COMPOSE MAIL

Inbox (3)

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Drafts (2)

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Urgent!

12 more ▾

Chat



Search, add, or invite

Hiking Fan

Set status here ▾

Call me

Ariel

Emily

Jason

Michael

Paul

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☐	★	Jim Kane	» M4/Action in Tacoma - Hi! I was doing a search on Google for VW's in Tac	Mar 6
☐	★	Google Voice	» New voicemail from (610) 810-5507 at 5:10 AM - Voicemail from (610) 810-5	Mar 6

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Yet hours and hours can
mysteriously get lost here...

And feeds that suck huge chunks of time away here...

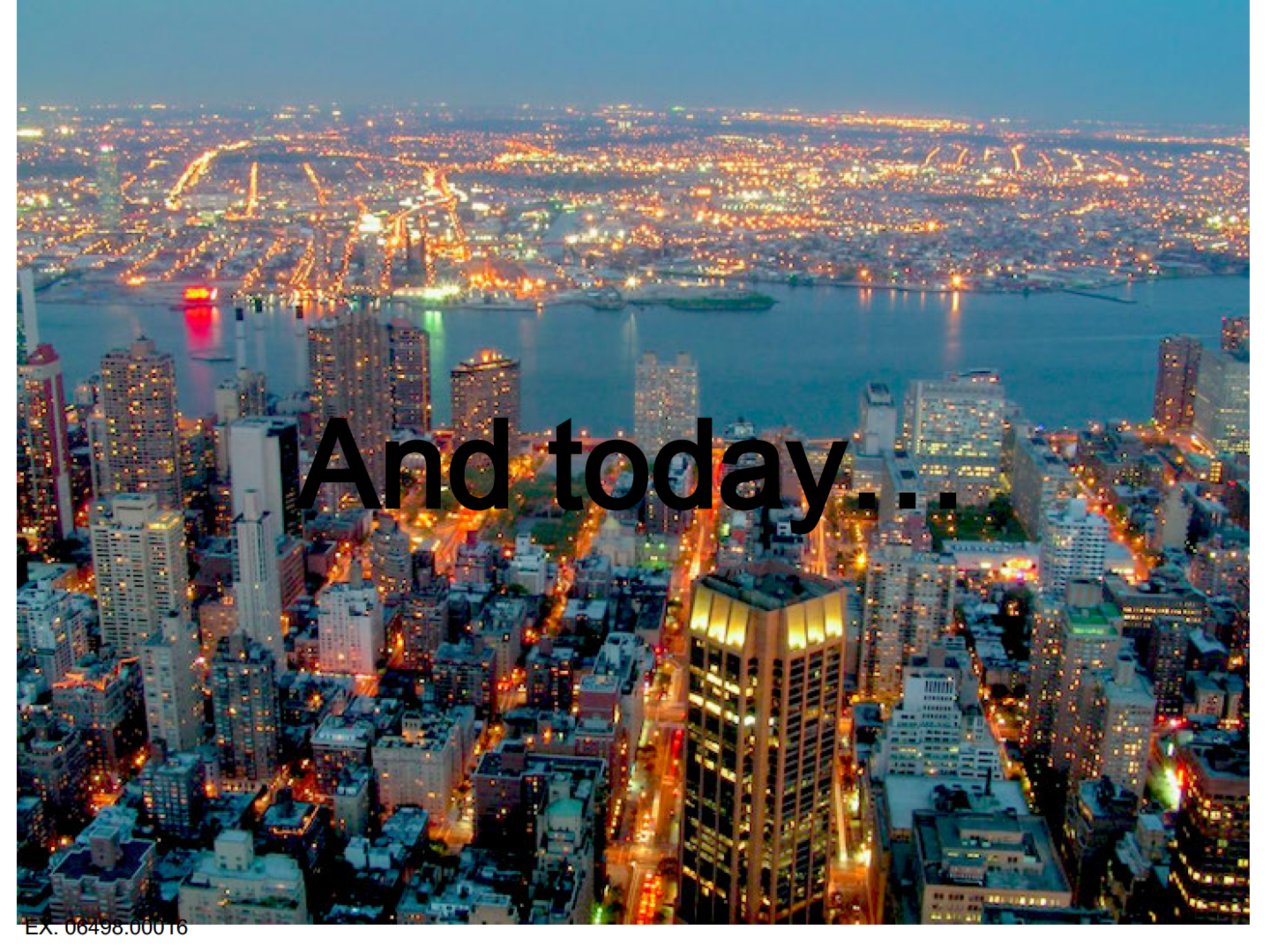
A photograph of three young men standing in a forest, each looking down at a smartphone. The man on the left wears a yellow beanie and a purple jacket over a brown shirt. The man in the middle has curly brown hair and wears a green jacket. The man on the right wears a grey knit hat with a moose pattern, glasses, and a grey hoodie. In the background, there are trees and a wooden cabin. A semi-transparent dark grey box with white text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

...changing our relationships to
each other here



...and destroying our kids'
ability to focus here

(teens 13-17 now send 4,000 texts/month,
once every 6 minutes awake)

An aerial night photograph of New York City, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous illuminated skyscrapers and buildings. The city lights reflect on the water in the harbor, and the overall scene is a vibrant display of urban illumination. The text "And today..." is superimposed in the center of the image.

And today...

Technology companies
profoundly influence where all
this attention goes...

In fact...



Never before in history...

...have the decisions of a **handful** of designers...



(mostly men, white, living in SF, aged 25-35)



... working at 3 companies ...



had

so

much



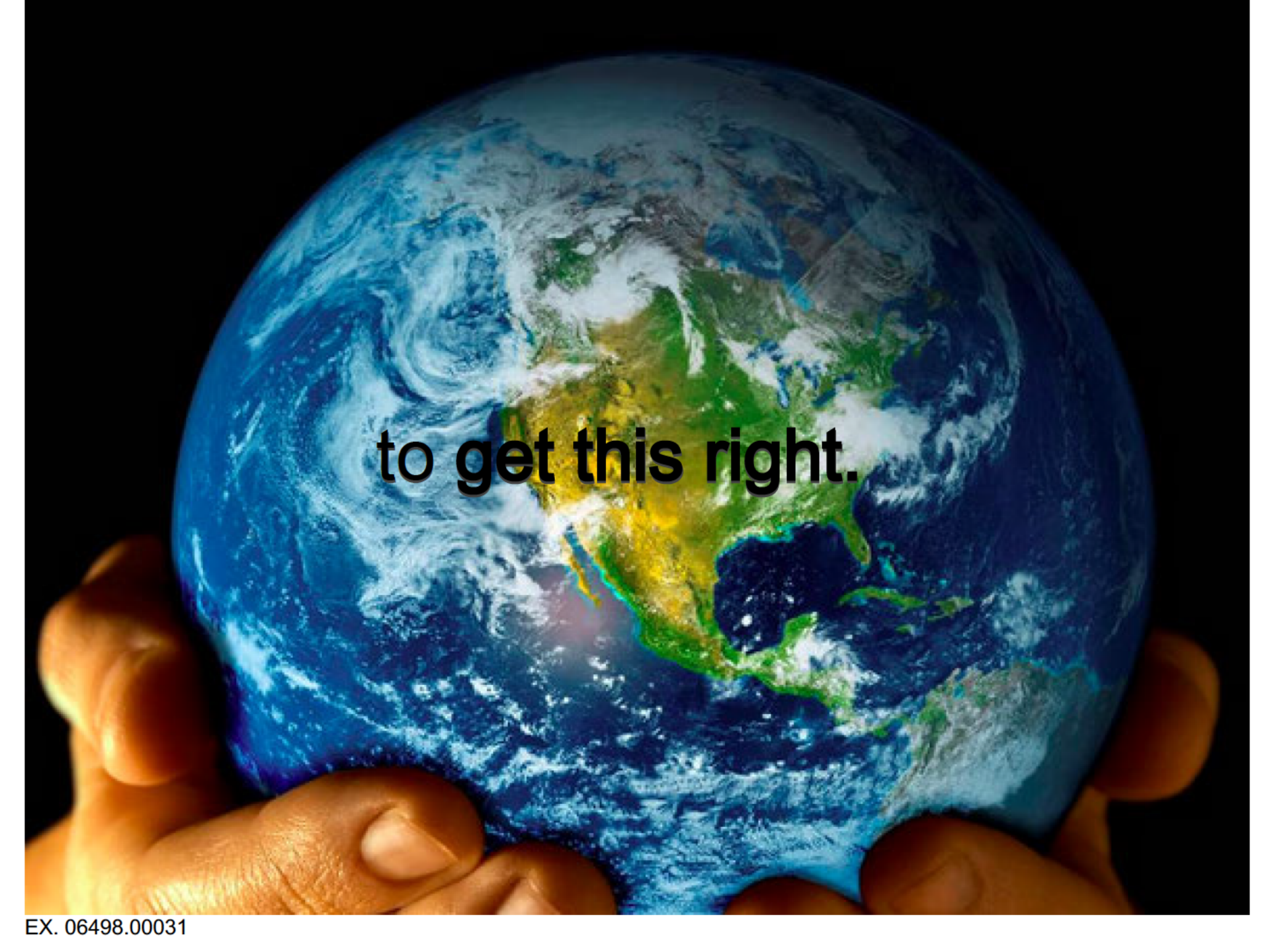
on how millions of people around the world spend their attention

think about that for a second...

We should feel...

A pair of hands is shown holding a small, realistic-looking globe of the Earth. The globe is tilted, showing the Americas and parts of Europe and Africa. The oceans are a deep blue, and the landmasses are green and yellow. White clouds are swirling around the globe. The hands are positioned at the bottom and sides of the globe, with fingers visible. The background is black.

...an enormous responsibility

A pair of hands is shown holding a small, realistic-looking globe of the Earth. The globe is tilted, showing the Americas. The oceans are a deep blue, and the continents are green with some yellowish-brown areas representing land. White clouds are swirling around the globe. The hands are positioned at the bottom and sides of the globe, with fingers visible. The background is solid black.

to get this right.

The Washington Post

[In the News](#) [Michelle Obama](#) [Inaugural balls](#) [Beyonce lip sync](#) [Sean Payton](#) [Texas shooting](#)

[washingtonpost.com](#) > [Metro](#)

28 percent of accidents involve talking, texting on cellphones

By Ashley Halsey III

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

Twenty-eight percent of traffic accidents occur when people talk on cellphones or send text messages while driving, according to a study released Tuesday by the [National Safety Council](#).

THIS STORY

- [More drivers texting on Beltway, study](#)

top **Network News**

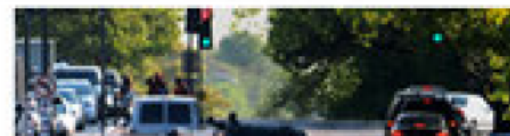
[PROFILE](#)



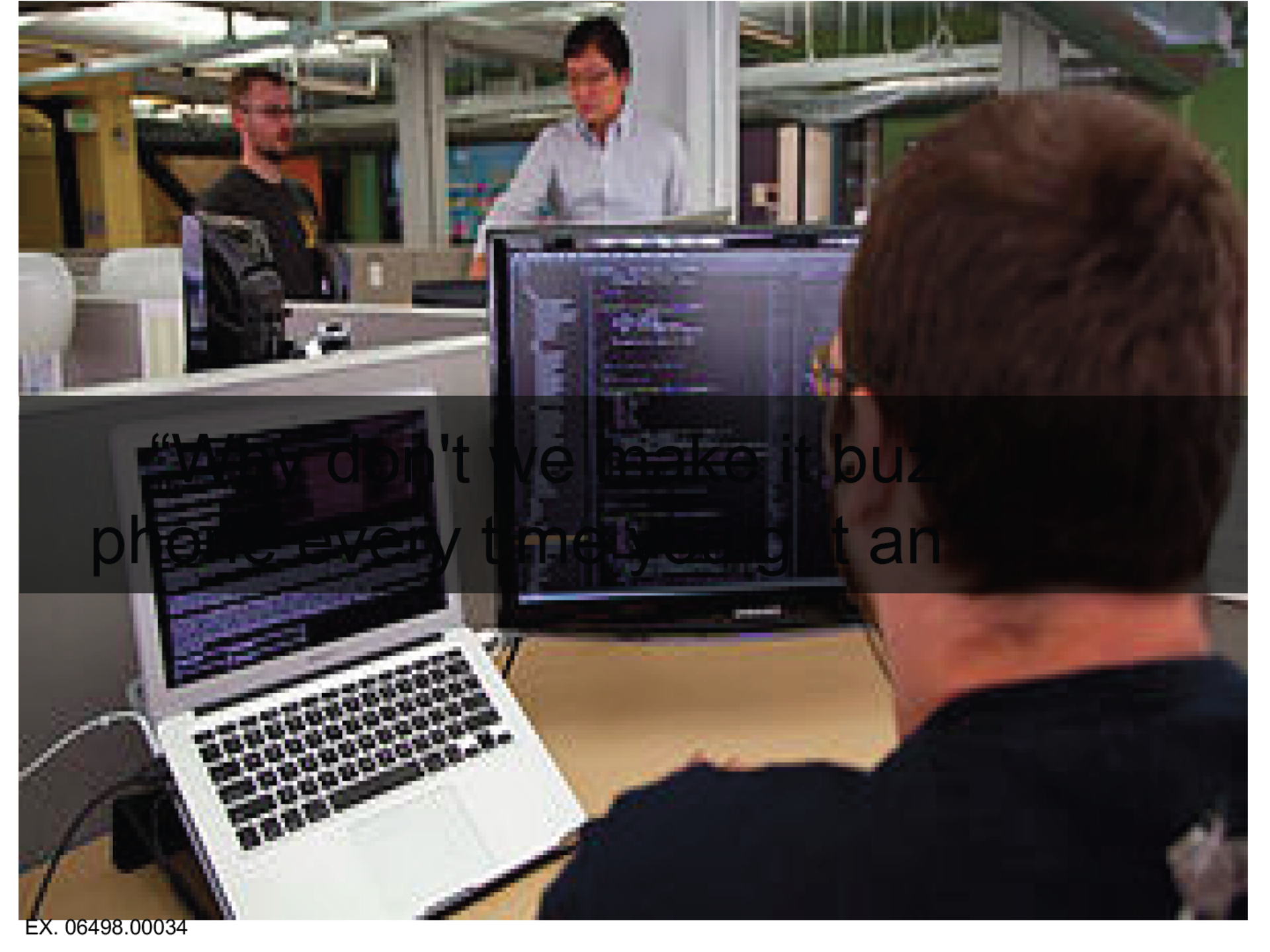
[View More Activity](#)



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**We need to be more rigorous
about these questions than...**

A person with dark hair is seen from behind, sitting at a desk in a modern office. They are looking at a large computer monitor displaying code. In the foreground, a silver laptop is open, also showing code. The office has a bright, open-plan design with other people visible in the background.

“Why don't we make it buzz
phone every time you get an

Now, you might be saying...

Wait a sec, don't users make
their **own choices** here?

Not always...

1. We need to acknowledge that **humans are vulnerable to certain biases**

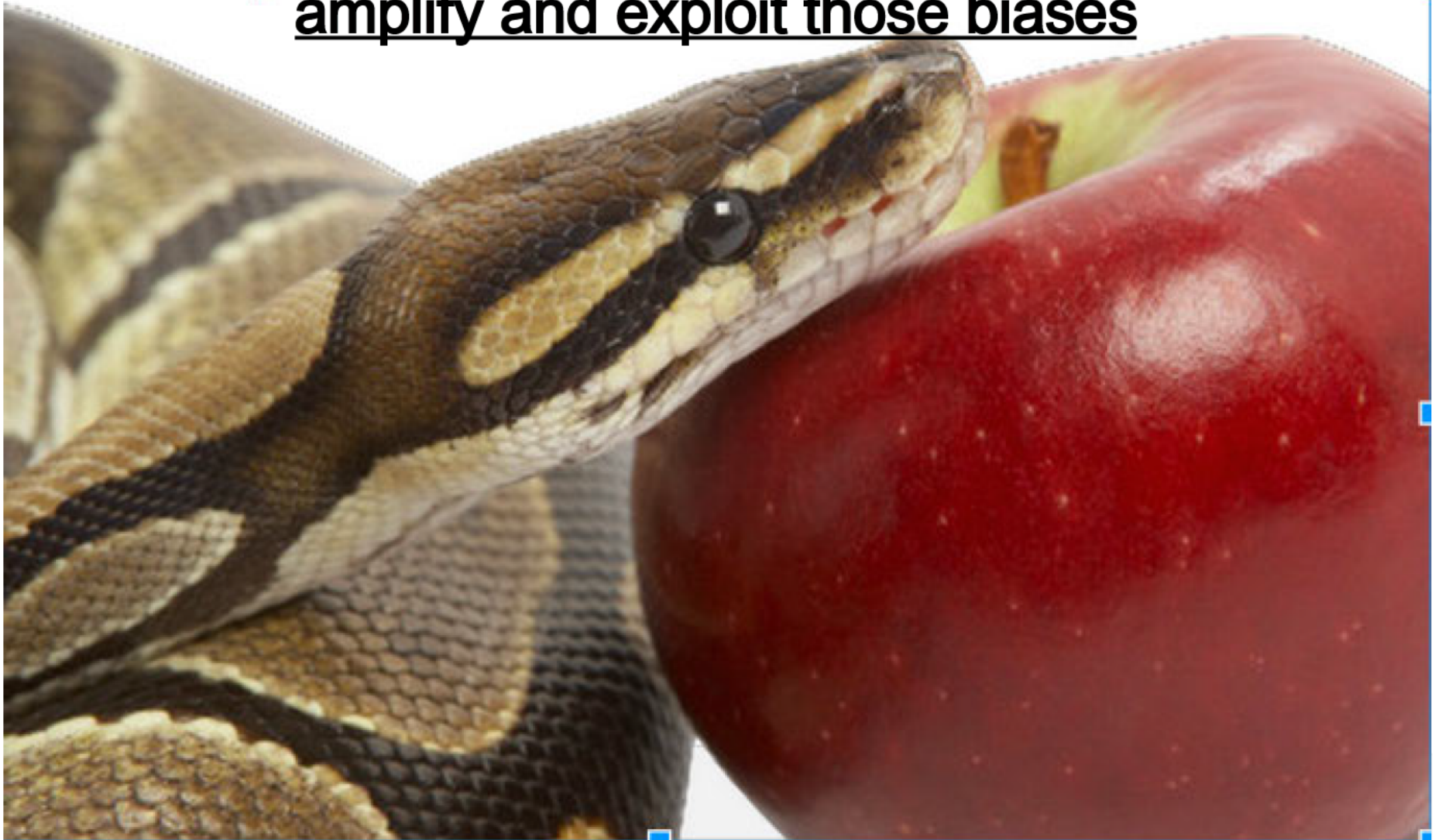


al and Proprietary

2. Those vulnerabilities can be amplified or exploited...



3. ...and the products we make can
amplify and exploit those biases



Every day, those vulnerabilities make us act
against our better judgement...

Vulnerability #1: Bad Forecasting (aka “That won't take long”)

facebook

[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

See Photo

Go to Notifications

what question are we
really being asked?

facebook

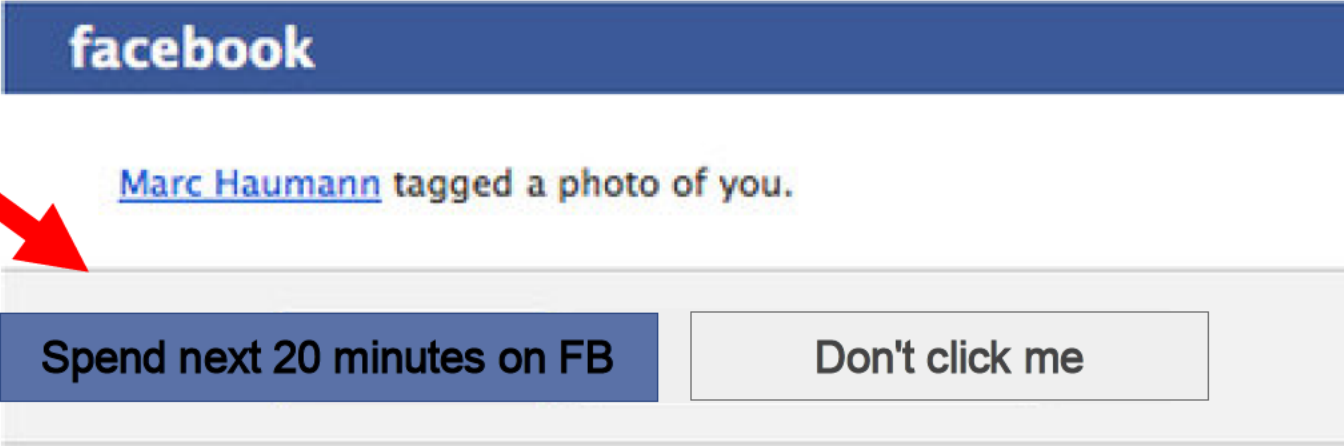
[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

See Photo

Go to Notifications

“Want to see this photo of you?”

or more like...

A screenshot of a Facebook notification interface. At the top is a dark blue bar with the word "facebook" in white. Below it is a notification: "[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you." Underneath the notification is a light gray bar containing two buttons: a dark blue button with the text "Spend next 20 minutes on FB" and a light gray button with the text "Don't click me". A red arrow points from the left towards the "Spend next 20 minutes on FB" button.

facebook

[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

Spend next 20 minutes on FB

Don't click me

“Do you want to interrupt what you're doing and spend next 20 minutes on Facebook?”

Post To Your Wall





Falcons TV | Top Combine Performances

<http://atlantafalcons.com/falconstv>

The NFL Network crew counts down their 10 best performances from the prospects at the 2012 NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis

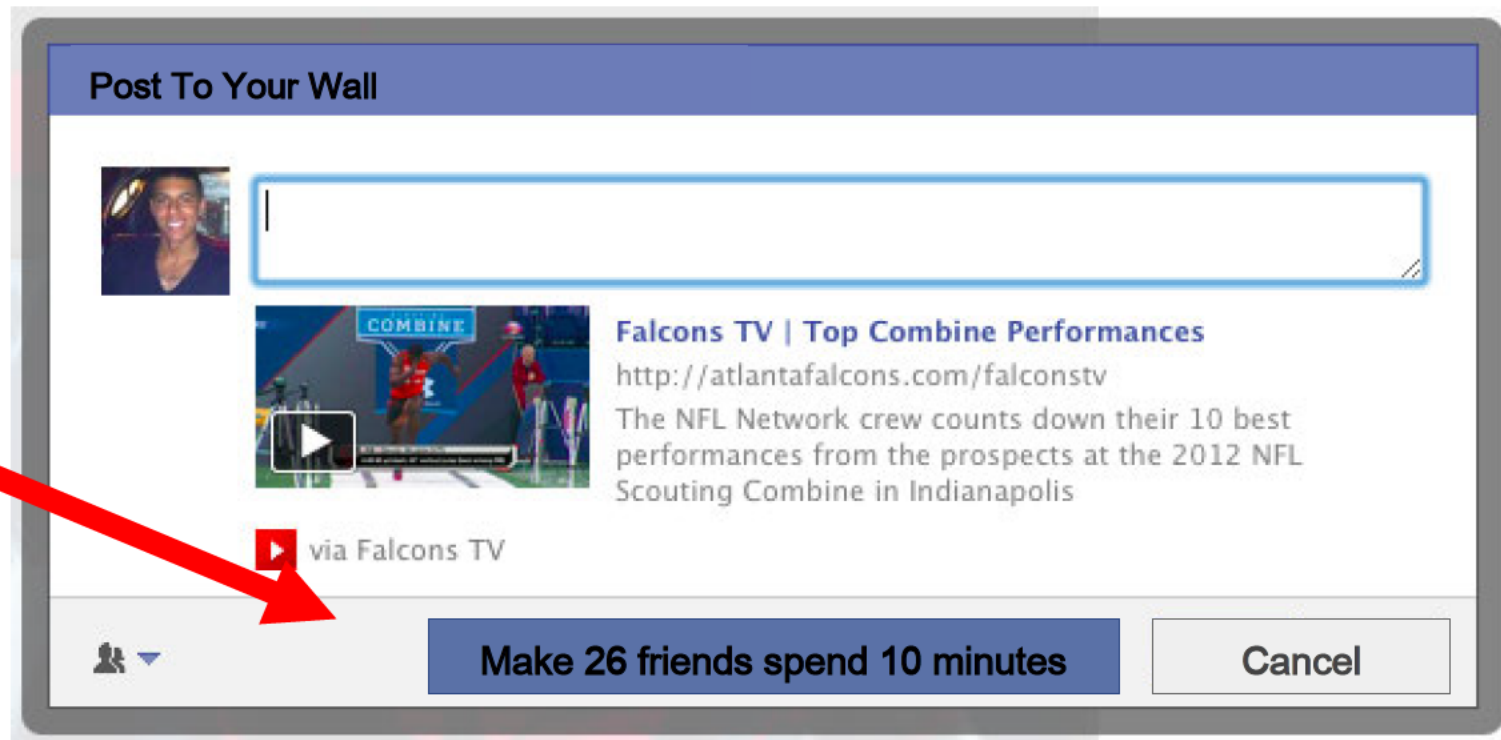
 via Falcons TV



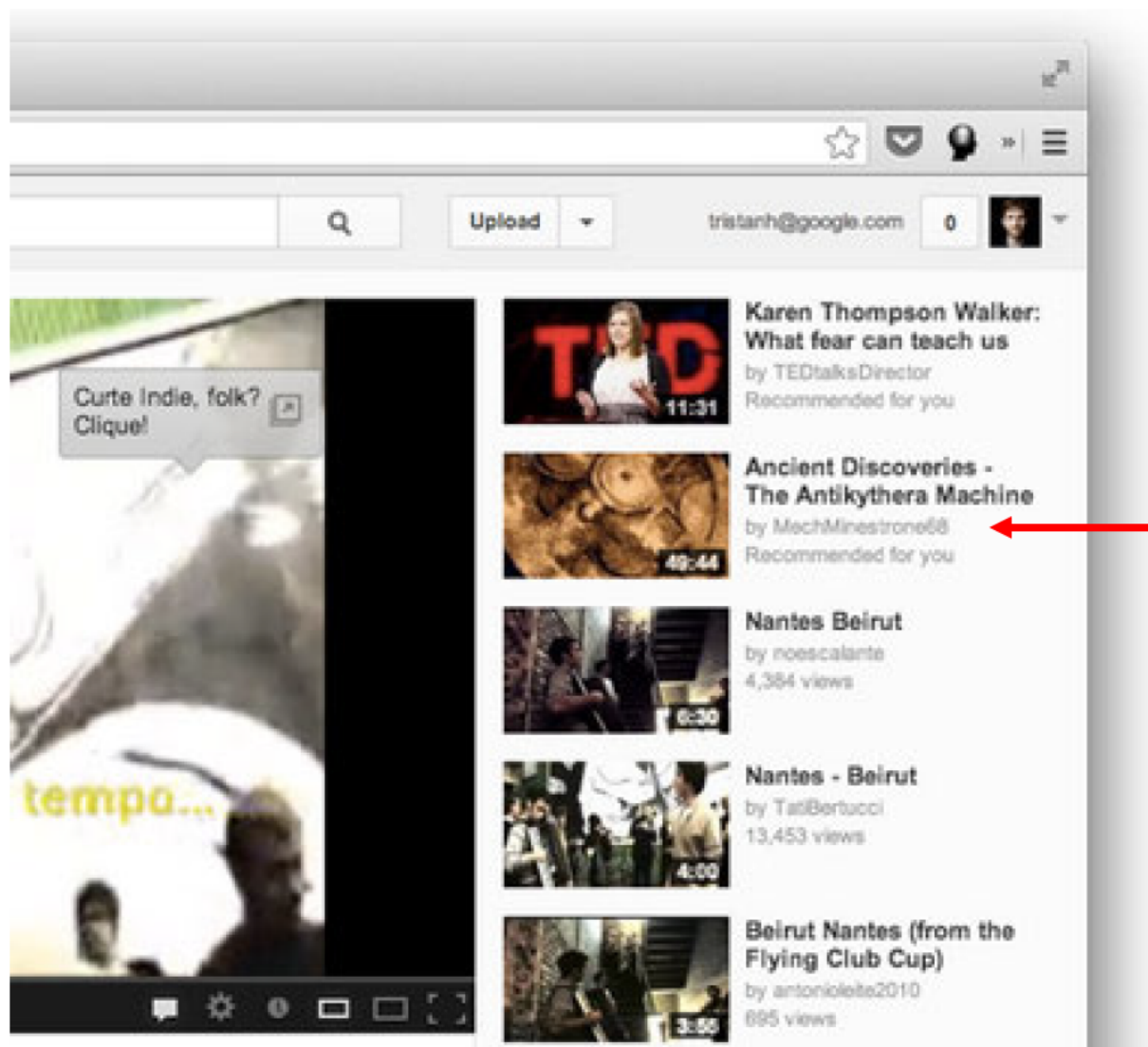
Share

Cancel

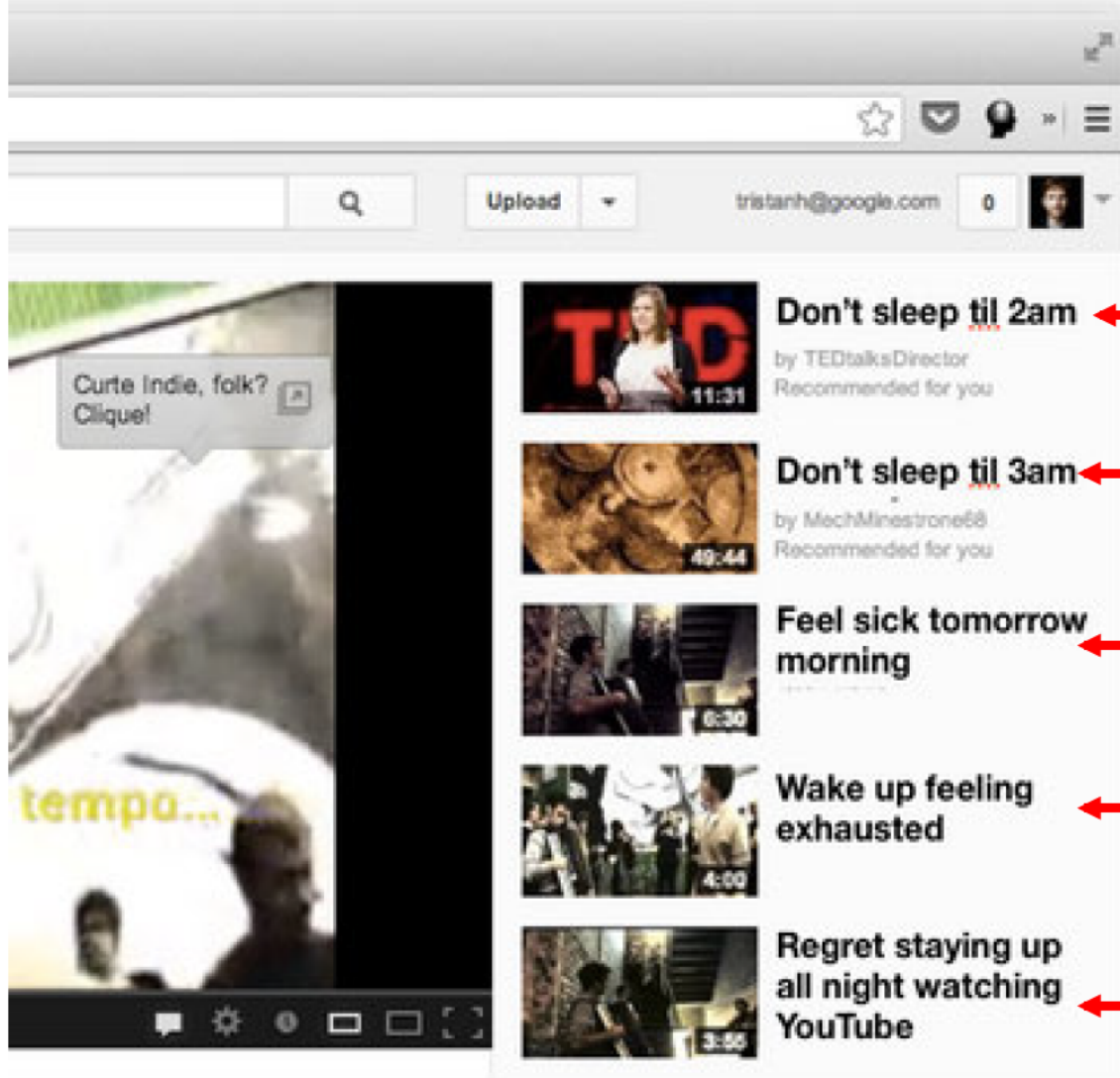
“Share this article?”



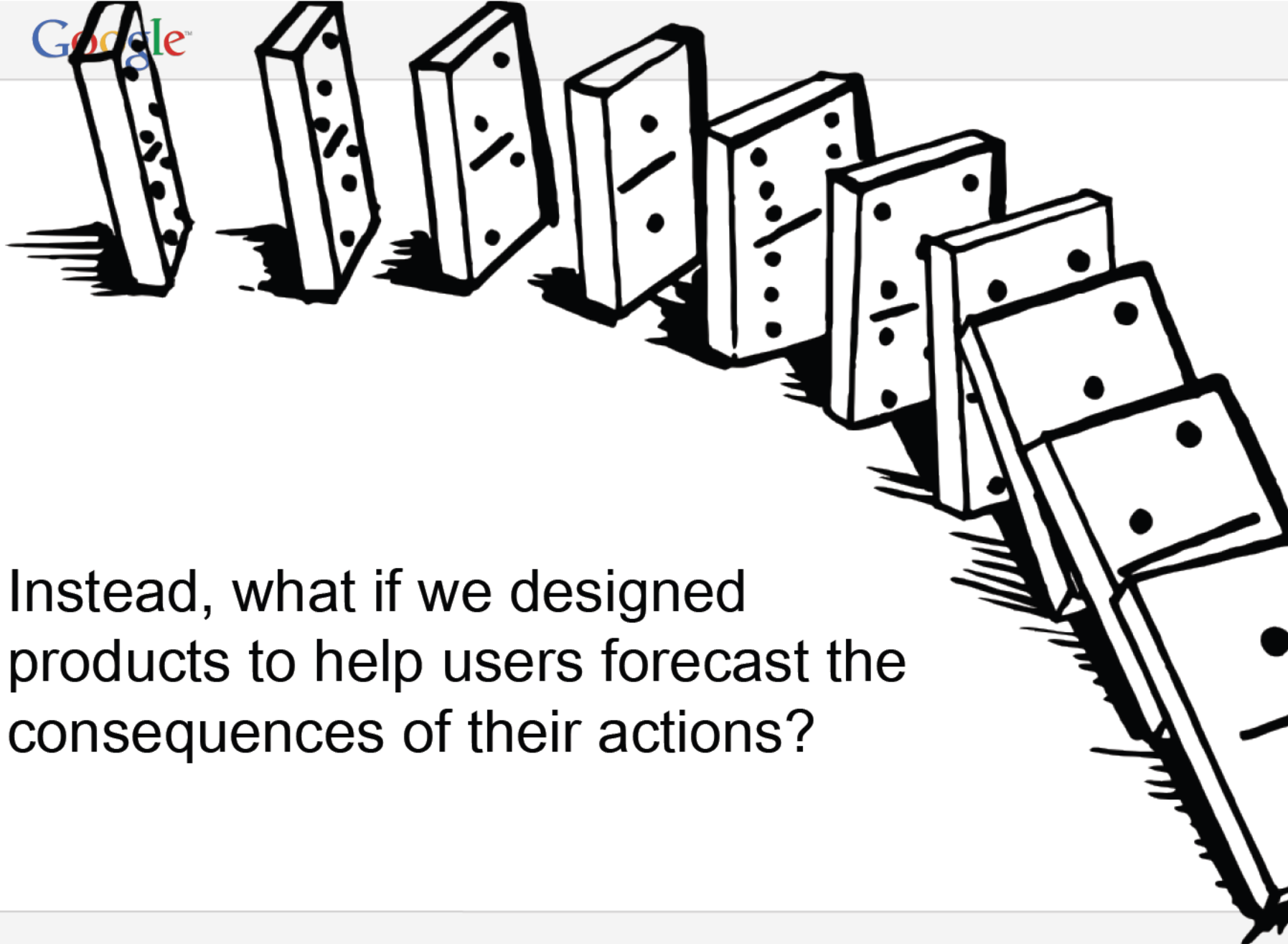
“Make ~26 friends spend 10 minutes reading this?”



Watch a related video?



or...



Instead, what if we designed products to help users forecast the consequences of their actions?

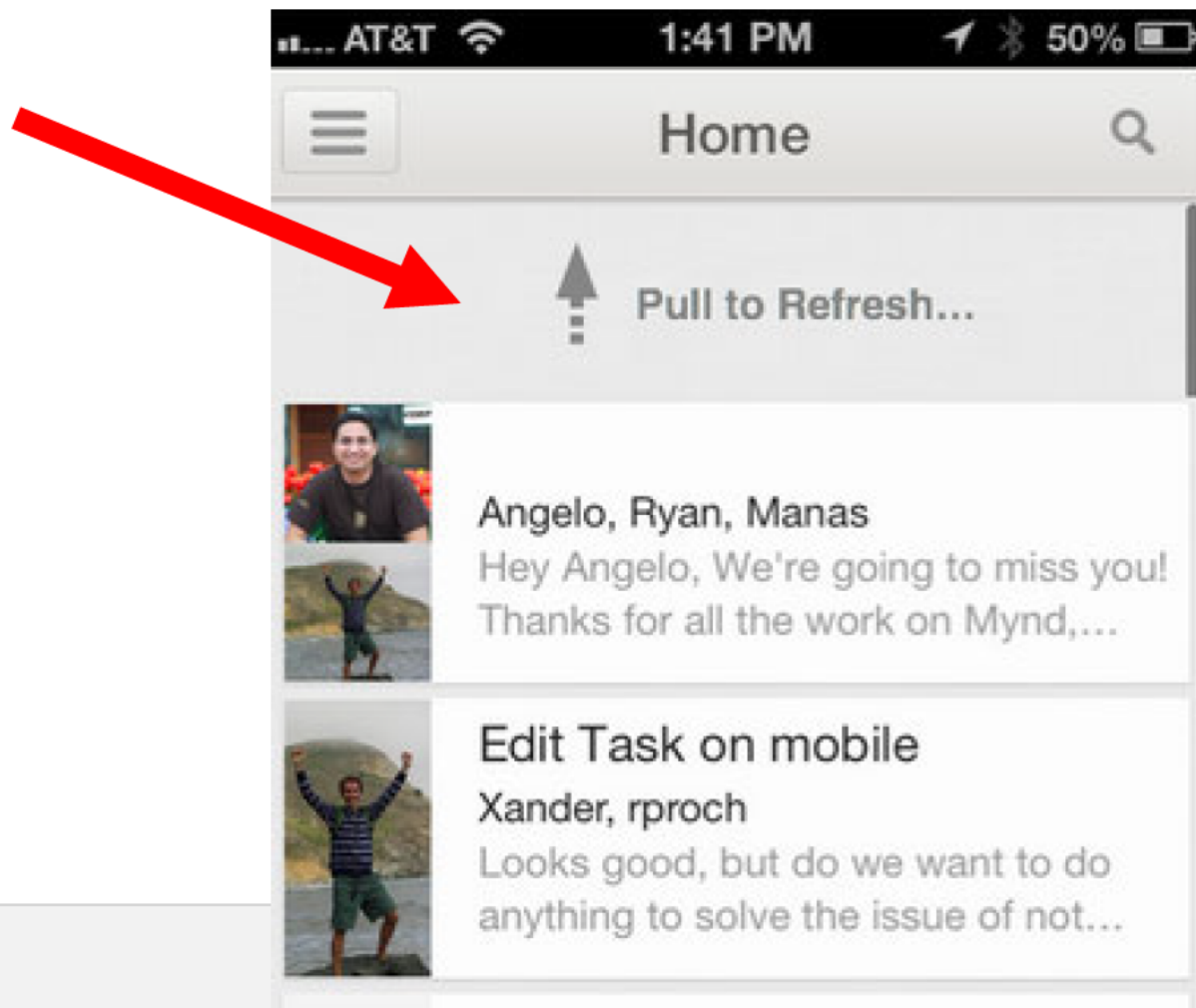
Vulnerability #2: Intermittent Variable Rewards (aka Slot Machines)



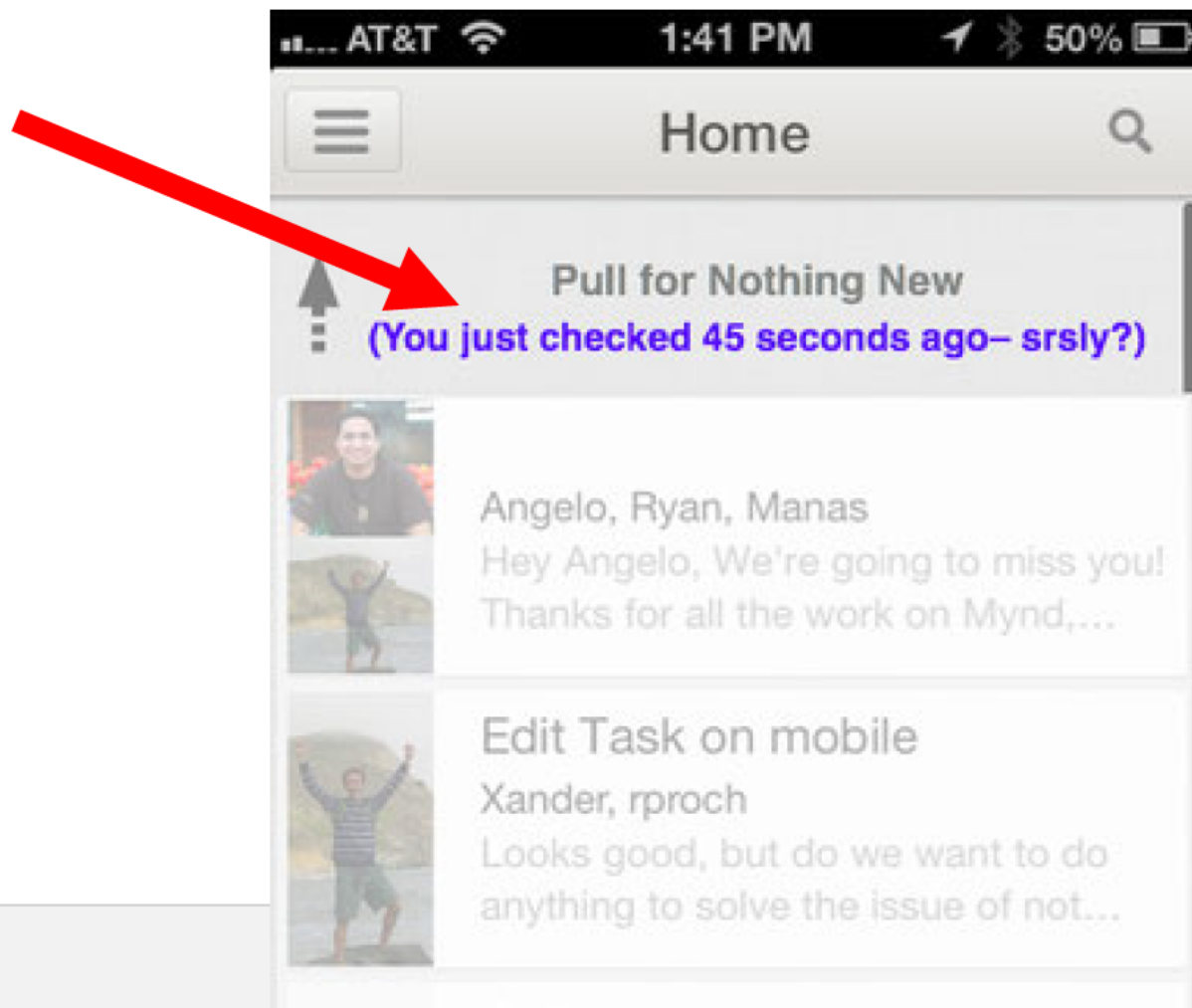
Intermittent (vs. predictable) rewards are the most addictive and hardest to stop

(slot machines make the most money at casinos)

are we deciding to pull for new email?



... or do we do it to feel the intermittent rewards?



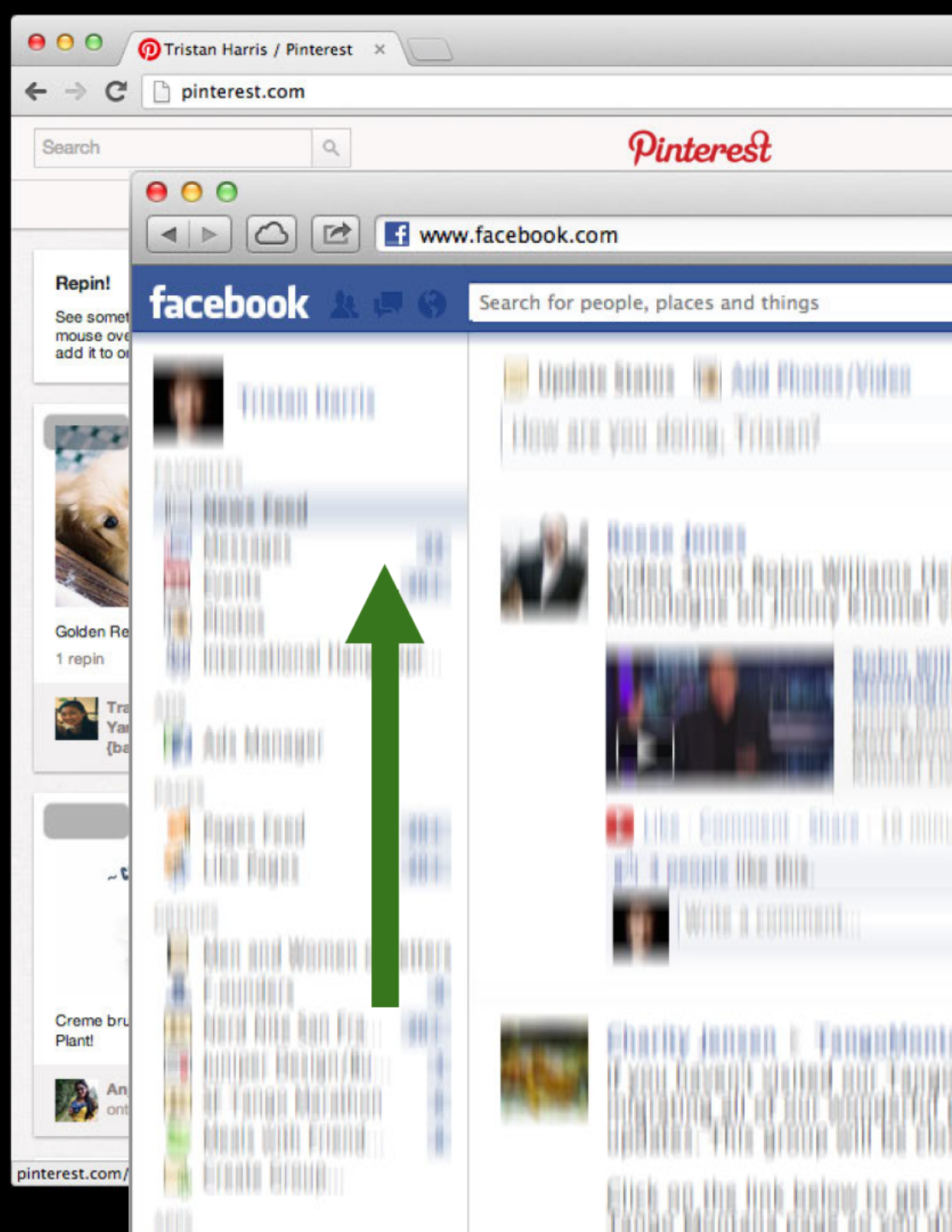
... are we **swiping**
two fingers to scroll?



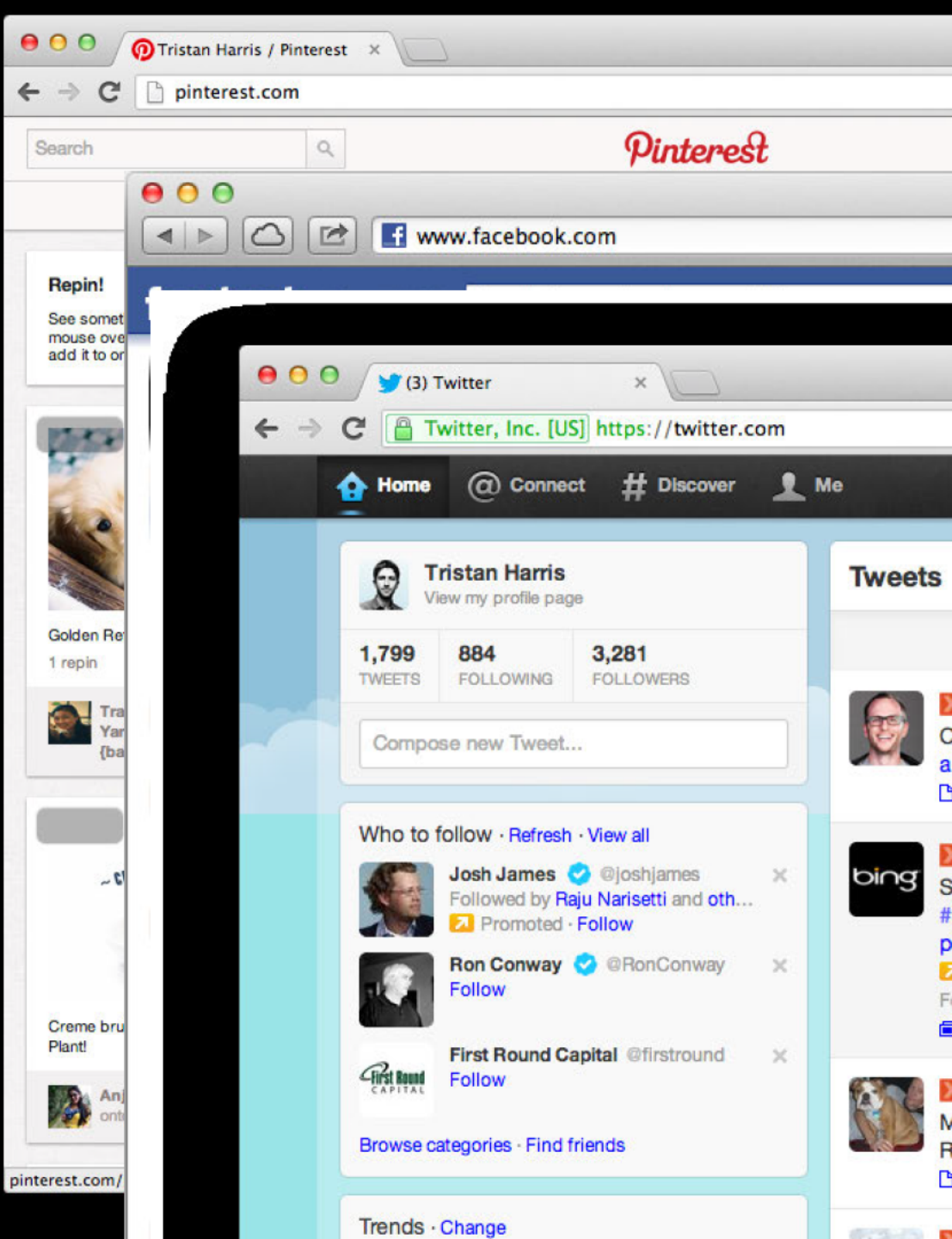
... or **playing** the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



These are attention casinos...



...because the house always wins.

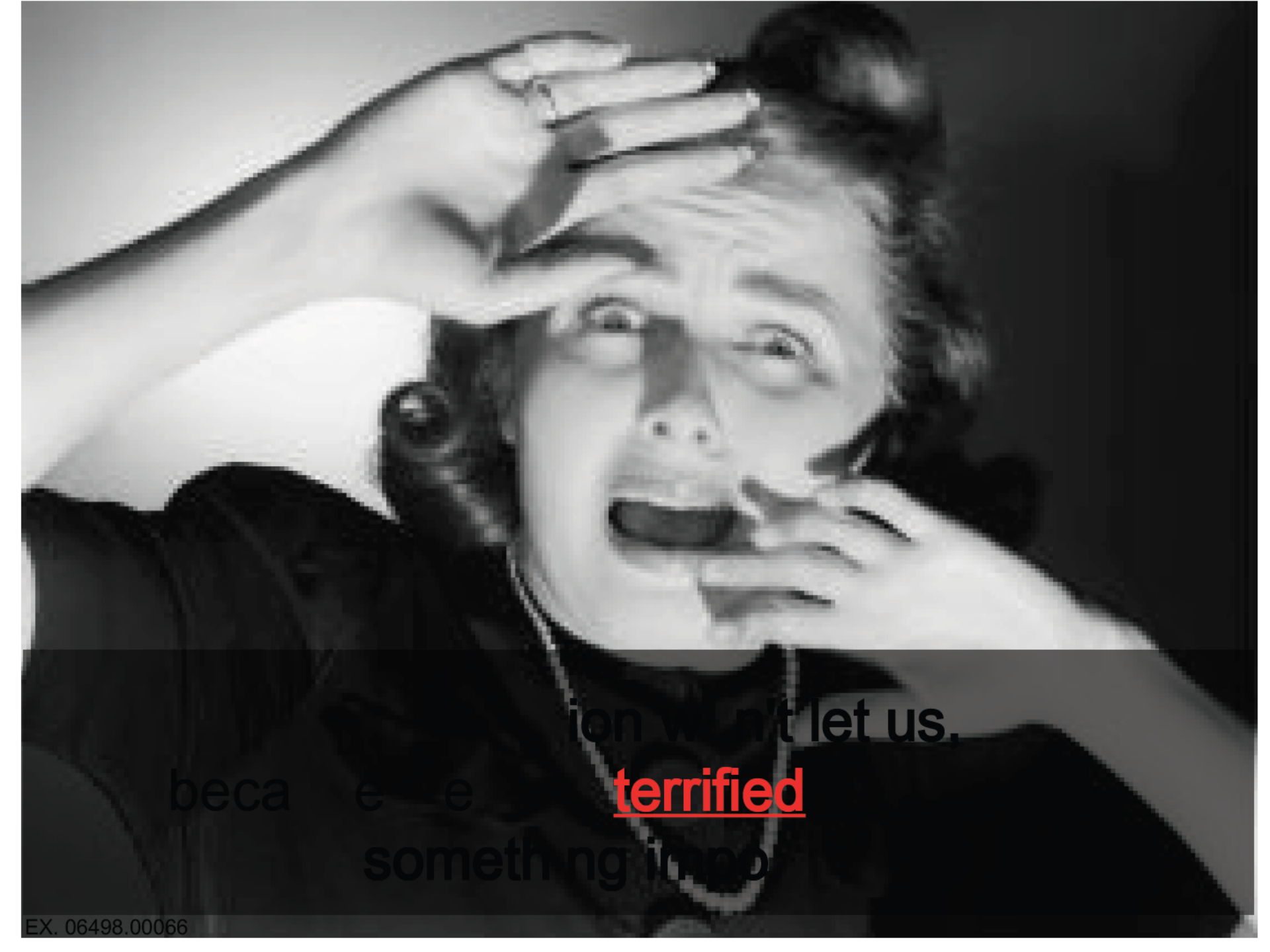
We spend lots of time - are we getting the same value back?



Instead, what if we designed to
minimize the presence of
intermittent variable rewards, and
reduce addictions?

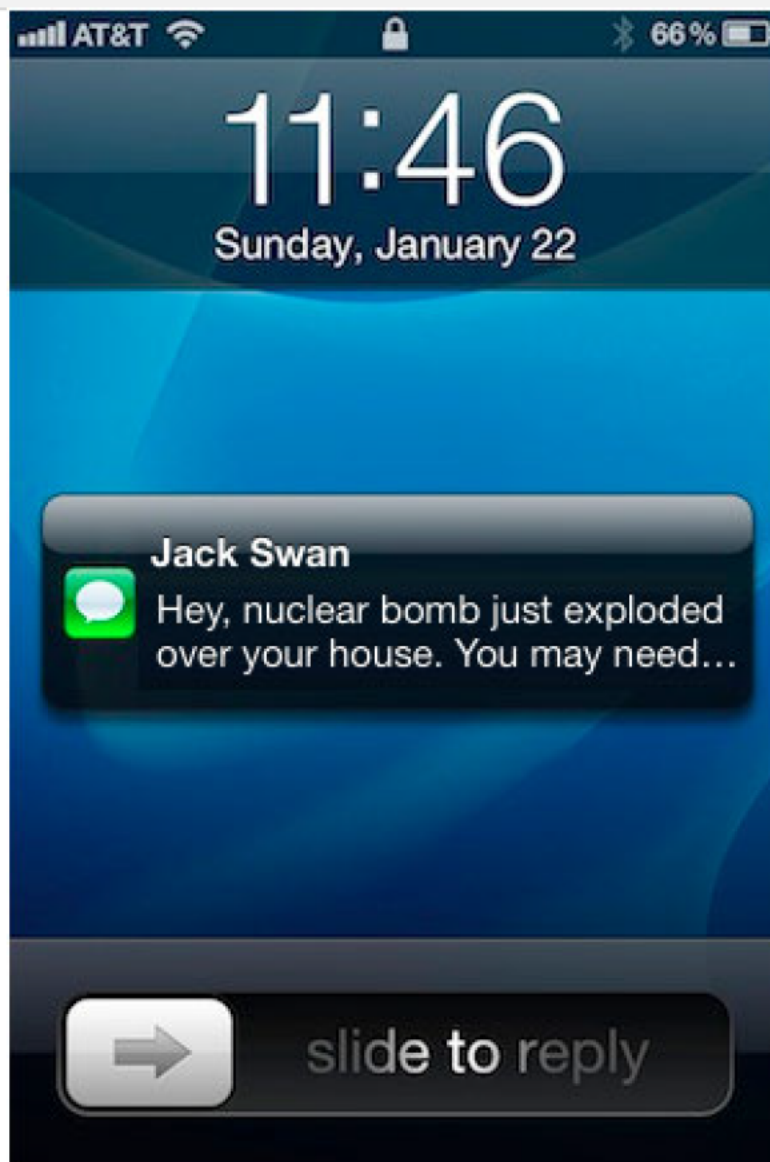
Vulnerability #3: Loss-Aversion (aka Fear of Missing Out)

Suppose we actually
wanted to stop checking all
this stuff...

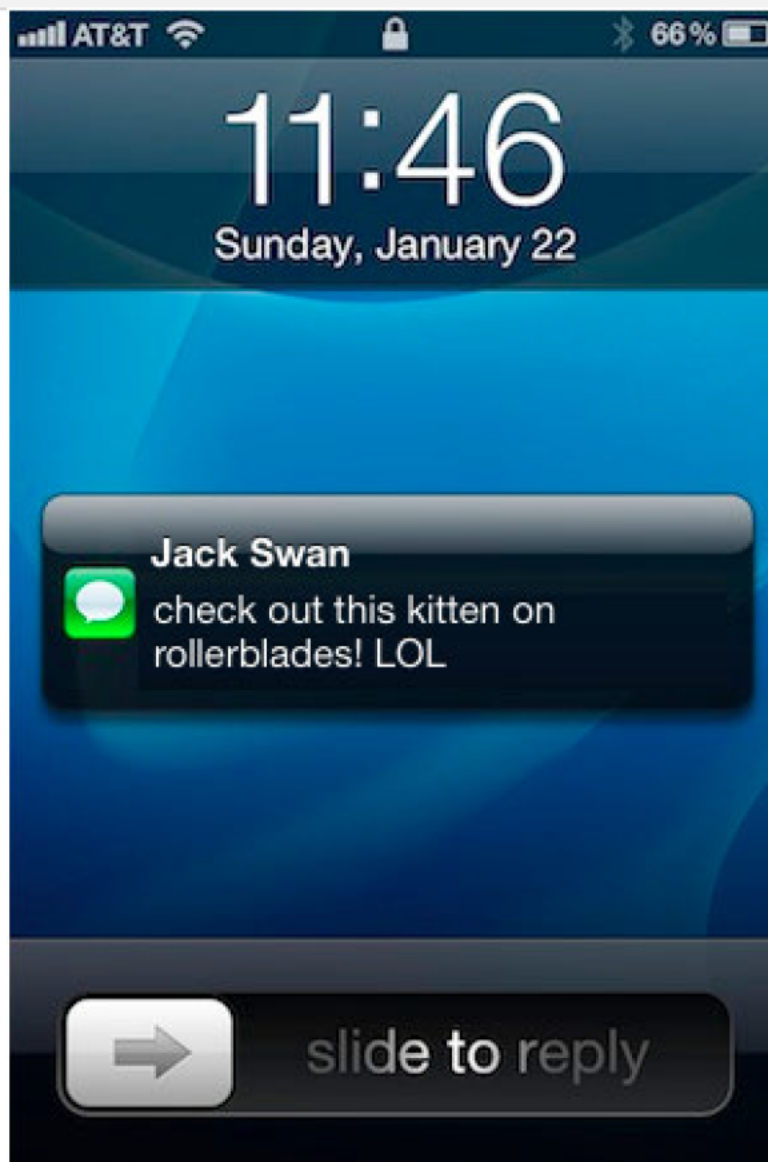


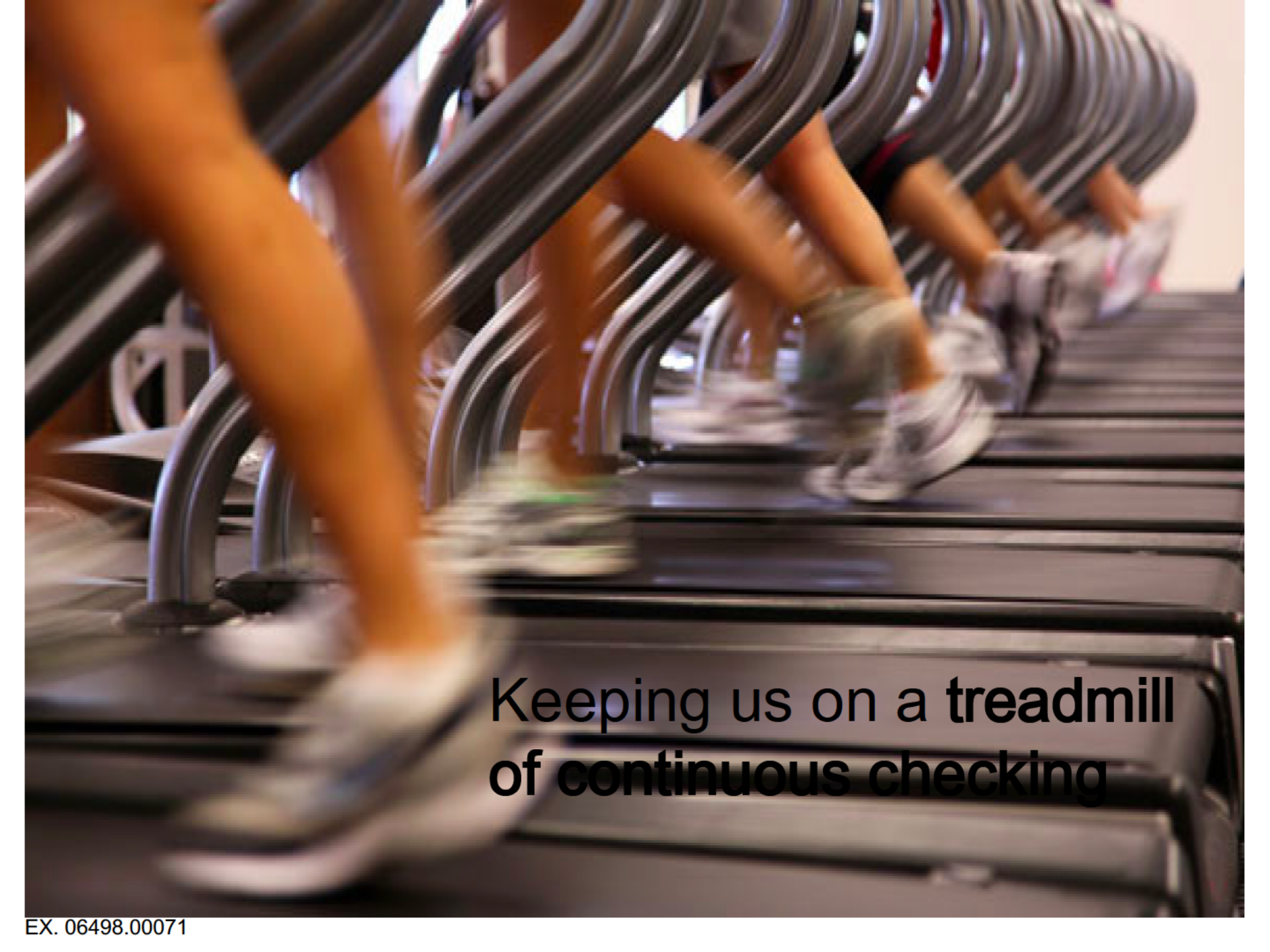
...ion won't let us,
because we're terrified
something impossible

so we're forced to live as if every
message could be this...



instead of this...





Keeping us on a **treadmill**
of **continuous checking**

Instead, what if we designed to **give users confidence** that they could disconnect more often, and not miss something important?

Vulnerability #4:

Slow vs. Fast Thinking

(aka Mindful vs. Mindless behavior)

Humans make different decisions
when we **pause and consider**,
vs. when we **react immediately**.

If the impulse for a behavior is
too frictionless, we *lose the ability*
to consider before acting...



When scrolling is frictionless, we don't think before we flick to see what's next...

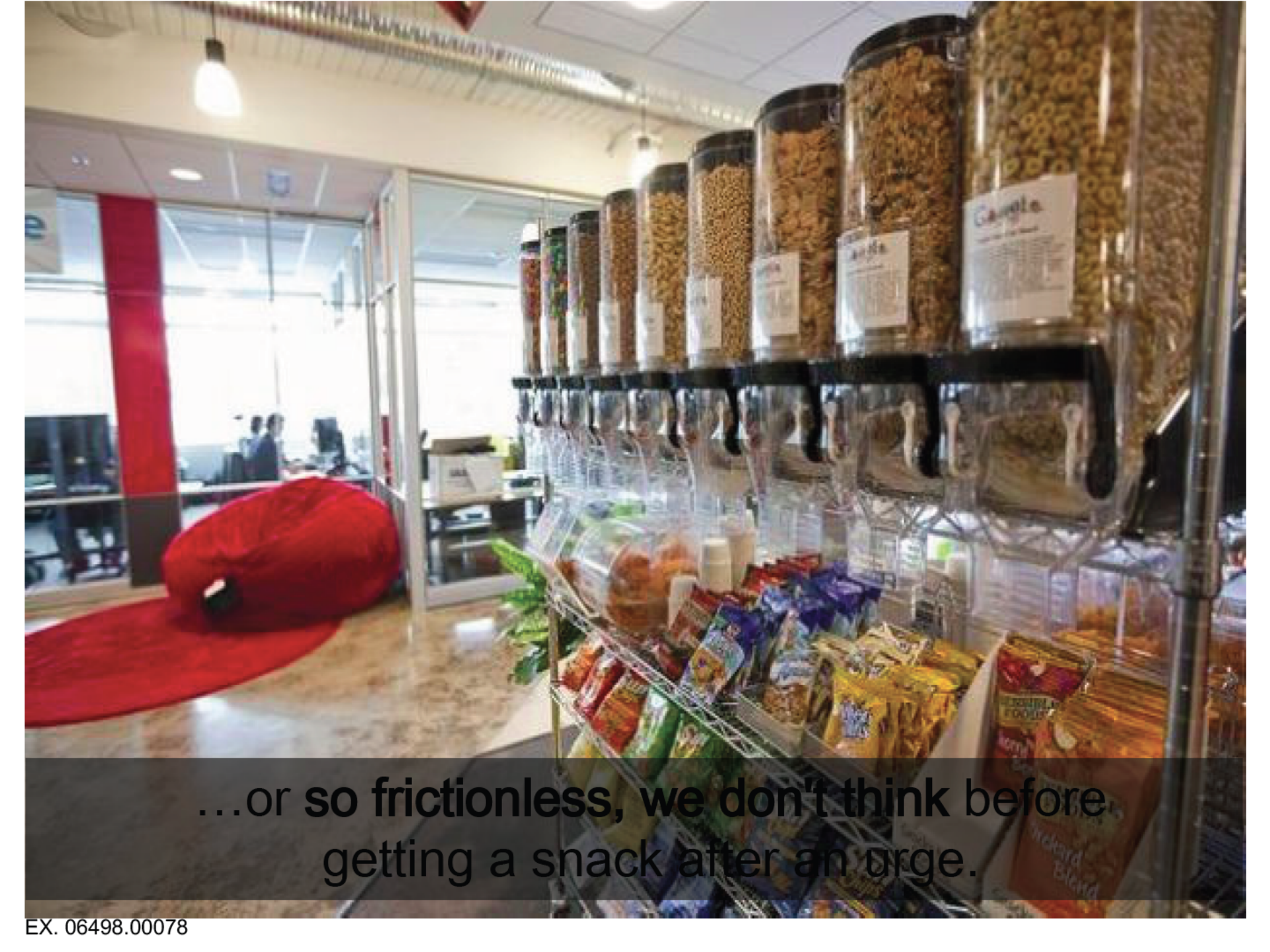


or when it's
so frictionless, we
don't think before
we grab our phone
after it buzzes



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...or so frictionless, we don't think before getting a snack after an urge.

When we **lose that moment to consider**
before acting on our impulses...



... we lose what sets us apart as
thinking humans.

Instead, what if we designed to help users be **fast and efficient**, while leaving *enough friction* for users to **pause and consider**?



...just like Google
makes unhealthy food
available, but puts them
inside jars and slightly
out of sight

(in other words, behind a **speed bump**)

Vulnerability #5: Stress & Altered States

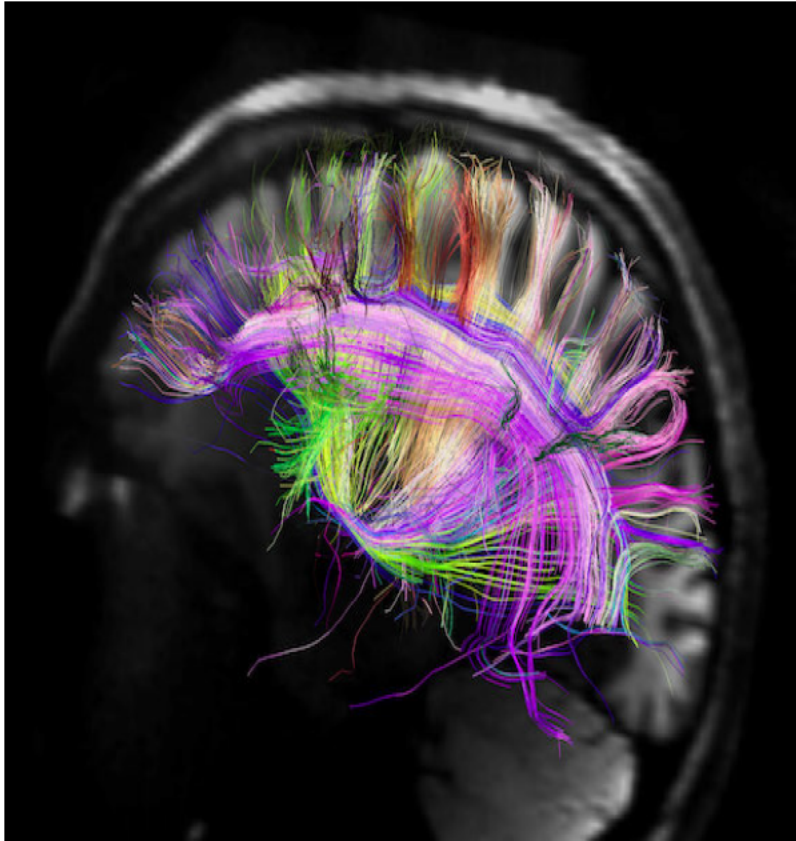
(aka “I’m not in the best state of mind to decide...”)

It's not just how technology changes
what we do...

It's also how it changes
our physiological state...



We actually
stop breathing when
we read our email...
(an effect known as “email apnea”)



...our sympathetic nervous system is activated



**...causing our liver
to dump glucose
and cholesterol
into our blood...**

...our heart rate increases...



...and our body prepares for a
fight or flight response





SEARCH MAIL

SEARCH THE WEB

[Show search options](#)
[Create a filter](#)

Mail



Archive

Report spam

Delete



Move to ▾

Labels ▾

More ▾



1 - 15 of 15



COMPOSE MAIL

Inbox (3)

Starred ★

Sent Mail

Drafts (2)

+ Hiking (3)

Urgent!

12 more ▾

Chat

Search, add, invite

Hiking F

Set status here ▾

Call phone

Arielle

Emily

Jason

Michael

Paul

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		Paul McDonald	» Fun Hike Yesterday! - Thanks for the great hike yesterday, it was awesome	1:06 pm
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		Michael Bolognino	» This weekend - Hi there. Let's meet up at 8PM tonight for burgers and then t	Mar 24
		Arielle Reinstein	» dipsea trail - When it stops raining I really want to hike the Dipsea Trail again	Mar 24
		Jason Toff	» How are you? - Hey there. We haven't spoken in a while. How are you? Wou	Mar 24
		Jr Wikane	» VW Auction in Tacoma - Hi, I was doing a search on Google for VW's in Tac	Mar 6
		Good	» New email from: (R10) R10, I	Mar 6

And all that happens between when
we read our 1st email...

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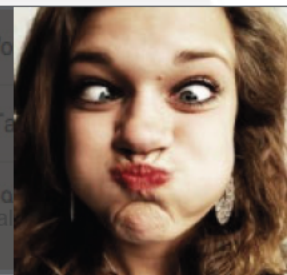
Emily

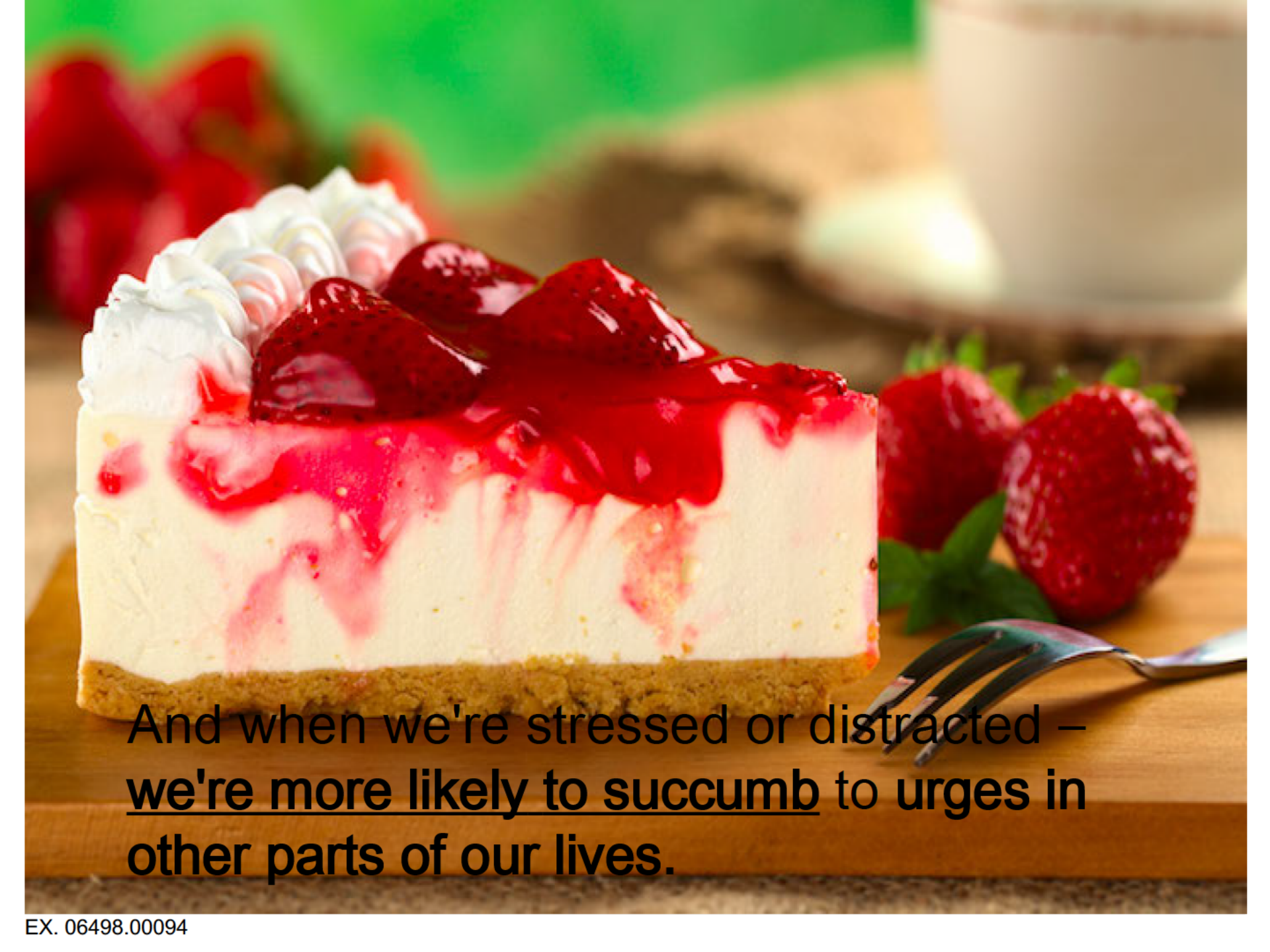
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		Google Voice	» New voicemail from (610) R10-5507 at 5:10 AM - Voicemail from: (610) R10	

and when we read our 10th email...

A close-up photograph of a slice of strawberry cheesecake. The slice is thick and sits on a golden-brown graham cracker crust. The filling is a smooth, white cream cheese. It is topped with a generous swirl of white whipped cream and several fresh, bright red strawberries. A vibrant red strawberry sauce is drizzled over the top and sides of the slice. The slice is placed on a light-colored wooden cutting board. To the right of the slice, two more whole strawberries with green leaves are visible. A silver fork lies on the board next to the slice. The background is softly blurred, showing more strawberries and a hint of a kitchen setting.

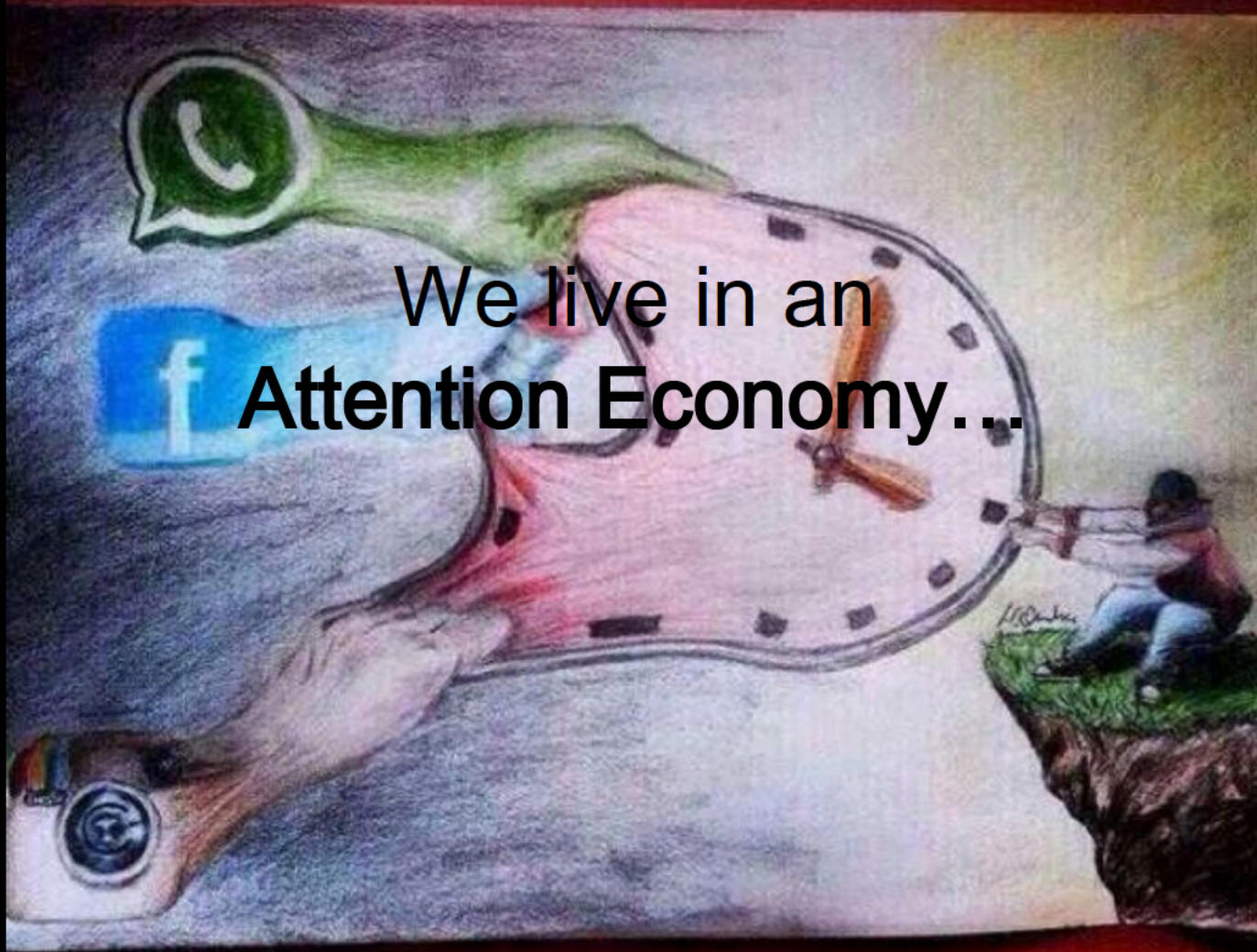
And when we're stressed or distracted –
we're more likely to succumb to urges in
other parts of our lives.

Do we really know what we're
doing to people?

Instead, what if we designed to
minimize stress and create
calmer states of mind?

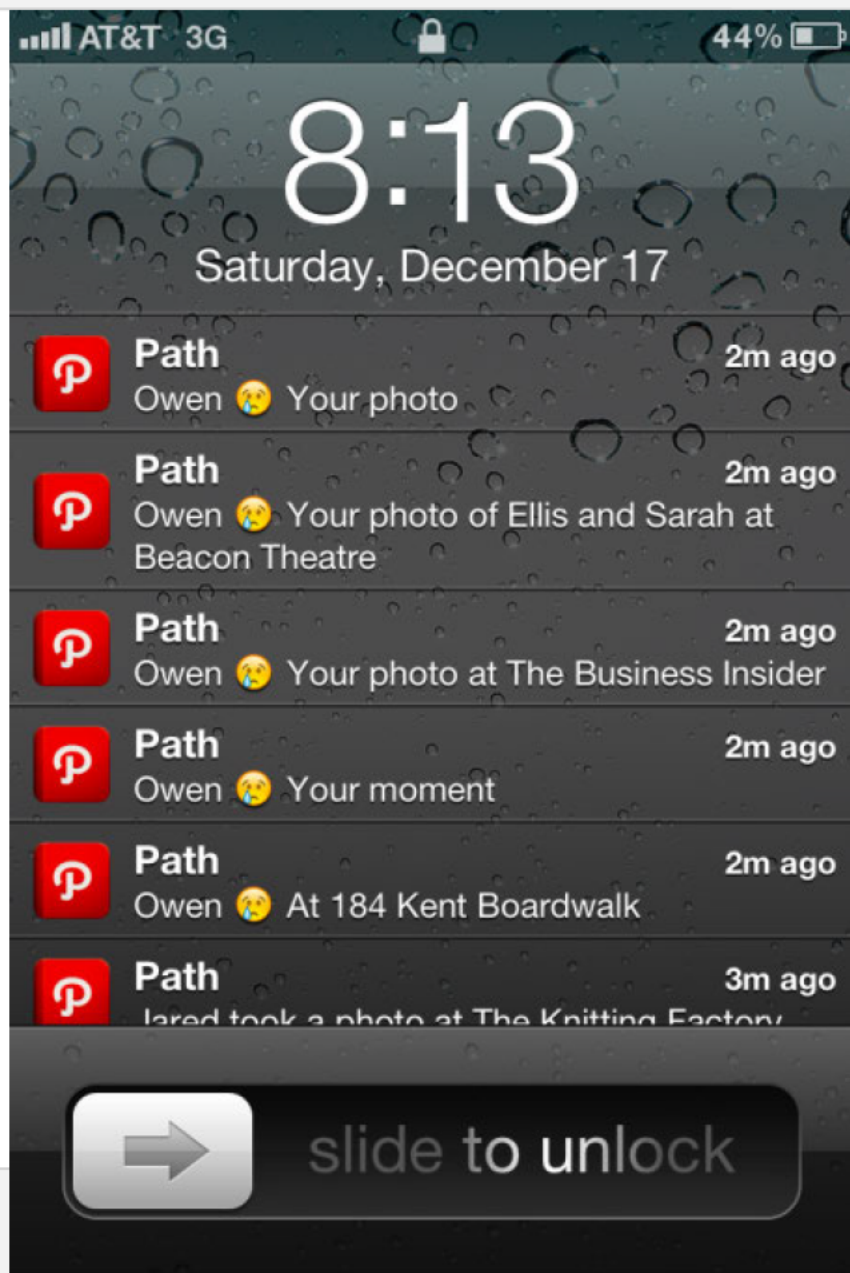
The problem is...

We live in an
Attention Economy...

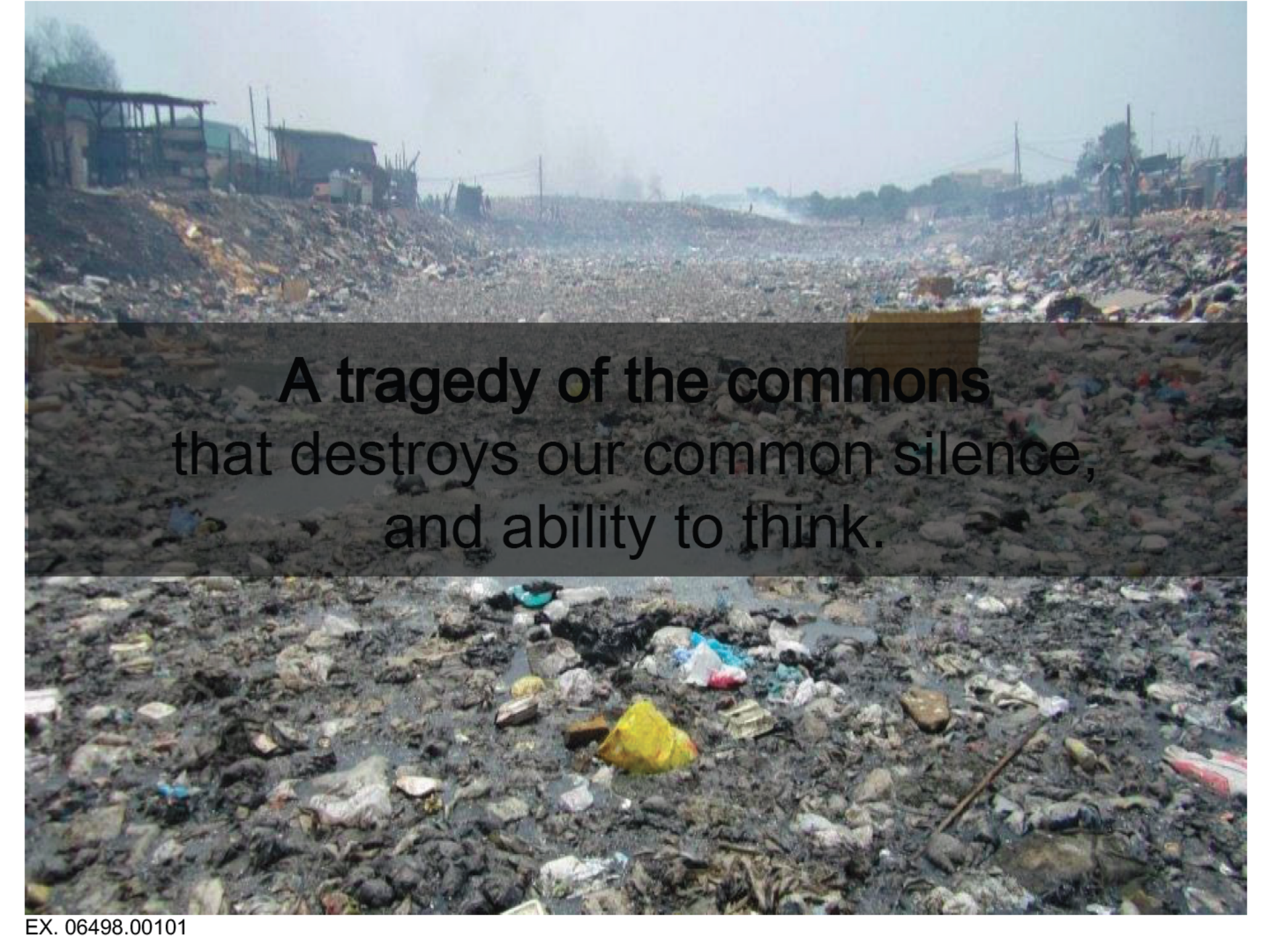


A man and a woman in business suits are crouching on a running track, ready to start a race. The man is in the foreground, looking directly at the camera with a determined expression. The woman is in the background, also looking forward. They are both in a starting crouch, with their hands on the ground and feet positioned behind them. The track is reddish-brown with white lane markings. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the track and some greenery.

...products will be exploiting our vulnerabilities
so they can't help but compete to steal our time.



...creating an
arms race to invent
more reasons to steal
people's time

A wide-angle photograph of a massive landfill. The ground is covered in a thick layer of trash, including plastic bags, crumpled paper, and other debris. In the background, there are some makeshift structures and utility poles. A semi-transparent dark rectangle is overlaid in the center of the image, containing white text.

**A tragedy of the commons
that destroys our common silence,
and ability to think.**

So...

what's the solution to all this?



As a former entrepreneur, I can say that niche startups are **too small** to tackle this challenge...

Change like this can only happen **top-down**,
from large institutions that define the
standards for millions of people...

Google

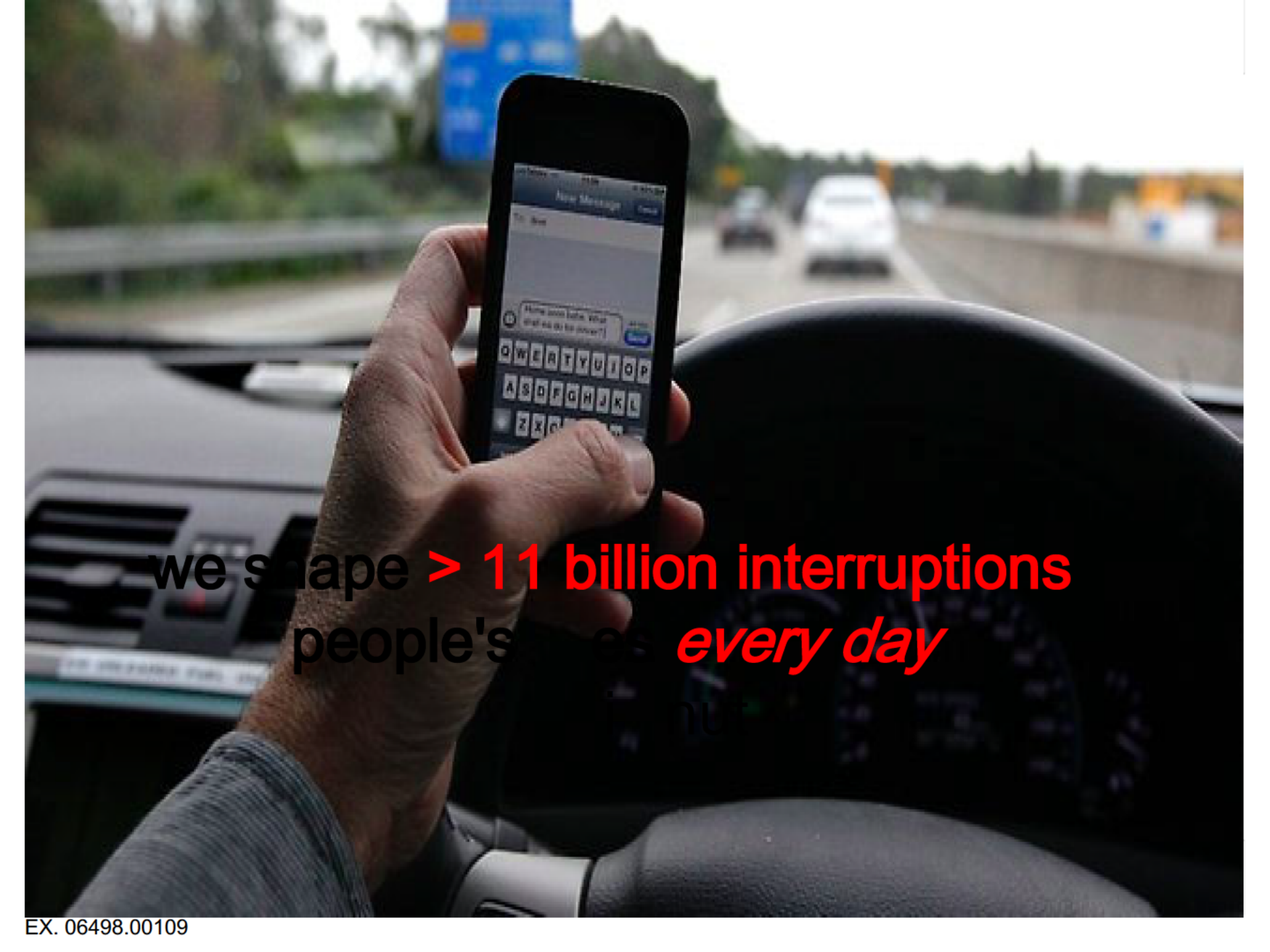
And we're in **a great position** to do something about all this...



ANDROID

We set the notification standards on
>50% of the world's mobile phones...

(4 trillion notifications sent last year on iOS alone)



we shape > 11 billion interruptions
people's lives *every day*
in just 15 minutes

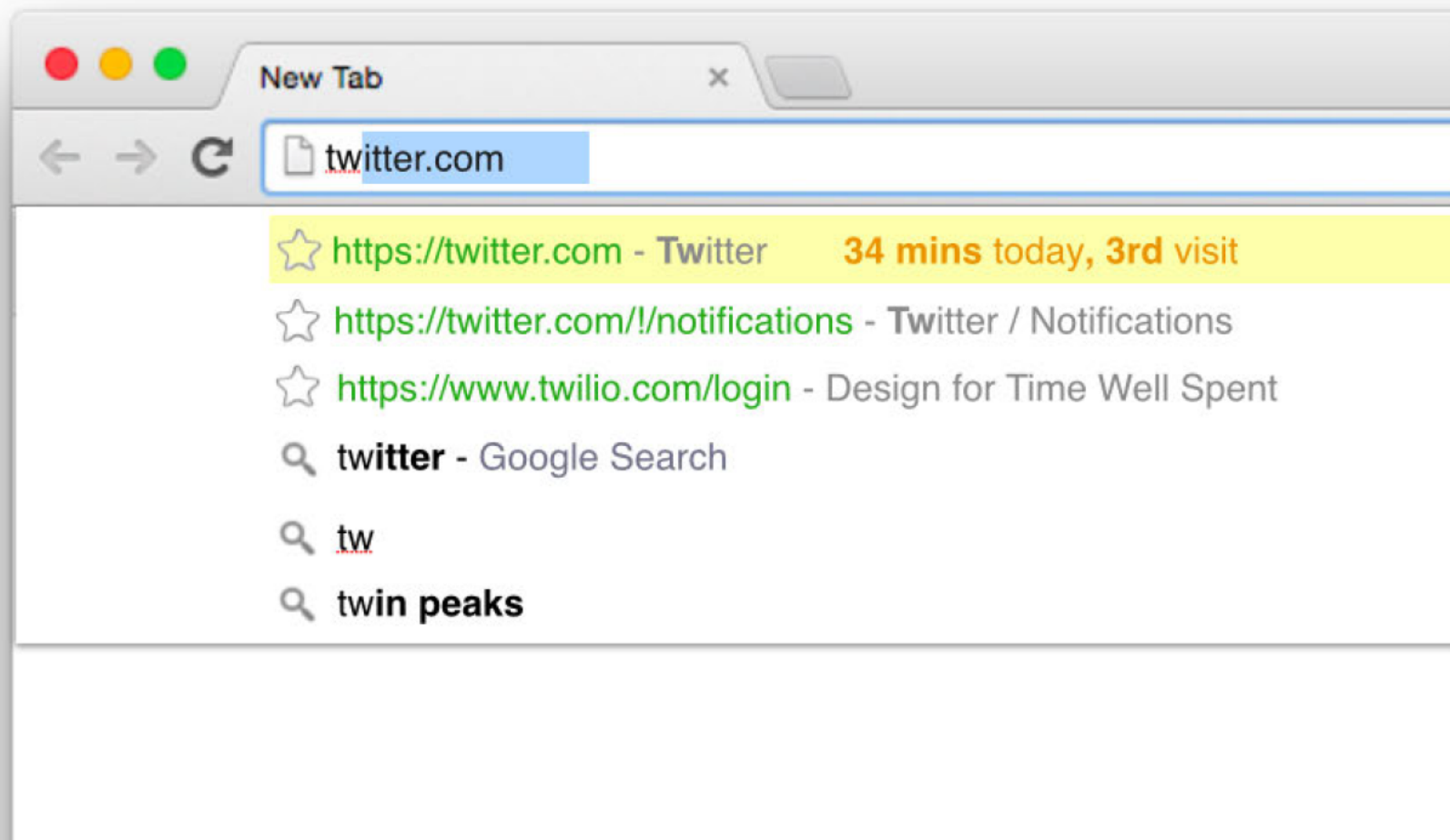


**Millions of knowledge workers spend
1/3rd of their day in our email product.**

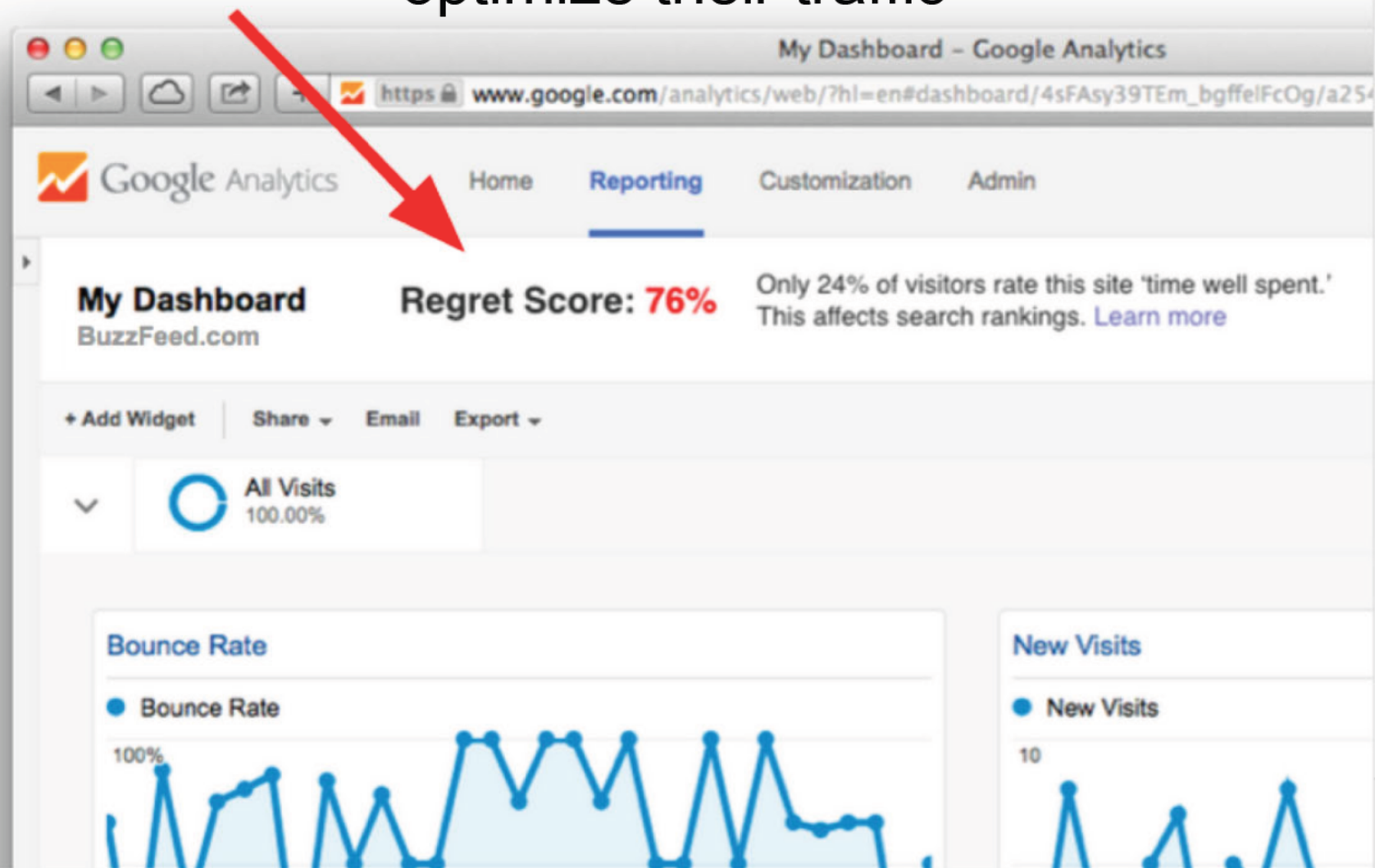


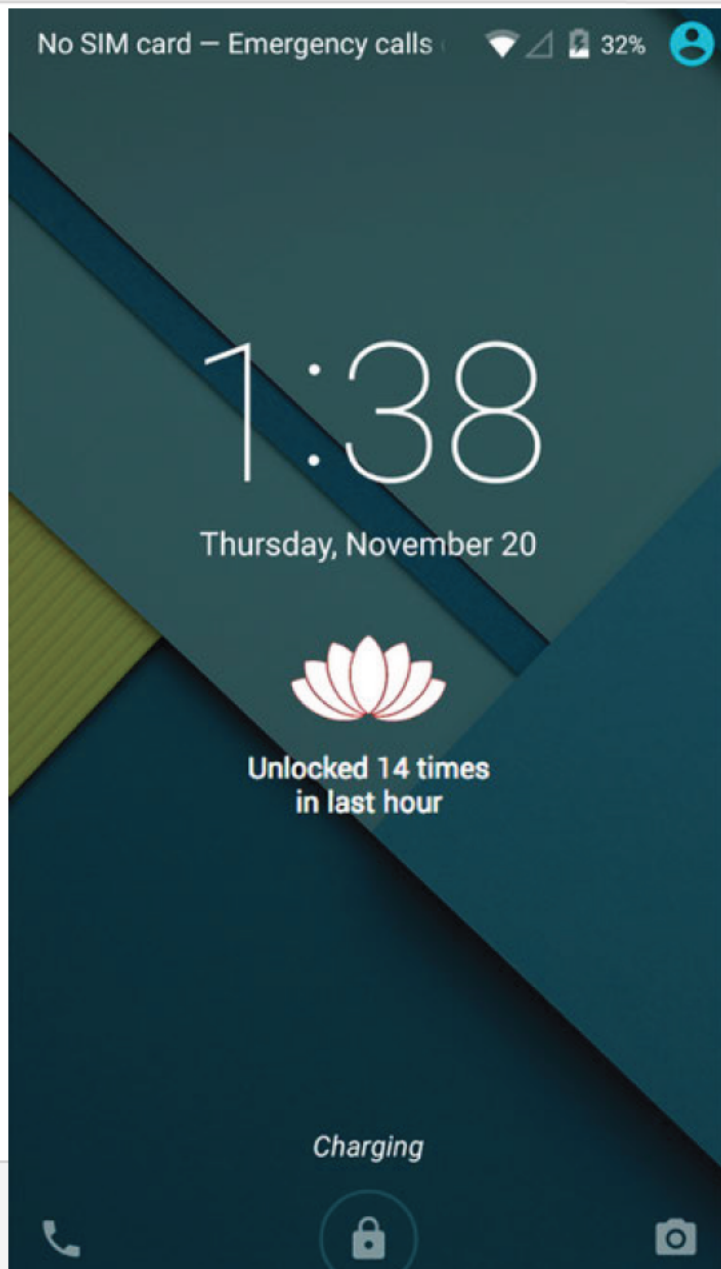
**Hundreds of millions of people live
in Chrome every day**

We design the omnibox they use to navigate
(what if they could self-monitor certain sites?)



We design the feedback websites use to optimize their traffic





**We design the
lock screen**
(used 150 times/day)



...and we have **fortunate** incentives.



Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky

Unlike most companies, our primary business model is **fulfilling human needs (searches)**, and *getting people on with their lives.*



...not maximizing
screen time.



Just like we trust our doctors to do what's
best and healthy for us



who swear by the Hippocratic oath to use
their knowledge ethically and do no harm.

...and just like we trust farmers to sell us
safe and healthy food...



...and to **ask careful questions** before making decisions that could affect our health





...because all we
can do is buy what
shows up at the
supermarket

Consumers

trust



...to make conscious decisions

**...since we choose the systems
and defaults that shape their lives**

We already care
get sh*t do

ng users



Let's care about
minimizing distractions

And let's care about helping users
spend time in ways they cherish.

We can design to reduce the
volume and frequency of interruptions.

We can design to be **respectful** about *when* to reach users— let it wait, unless it's important.

We can design to **keep users focused**, by putting temptations further away when they're trying to accomplish goals.



What if, instead of competing to hook people...

...there was a marketplace where things
compete to **help you *spend time well***



Just like Organic **changed the game** –
from competing for the *lowest price (at all costs)*



...to competing for price AND
Health, Safety and Sustainability

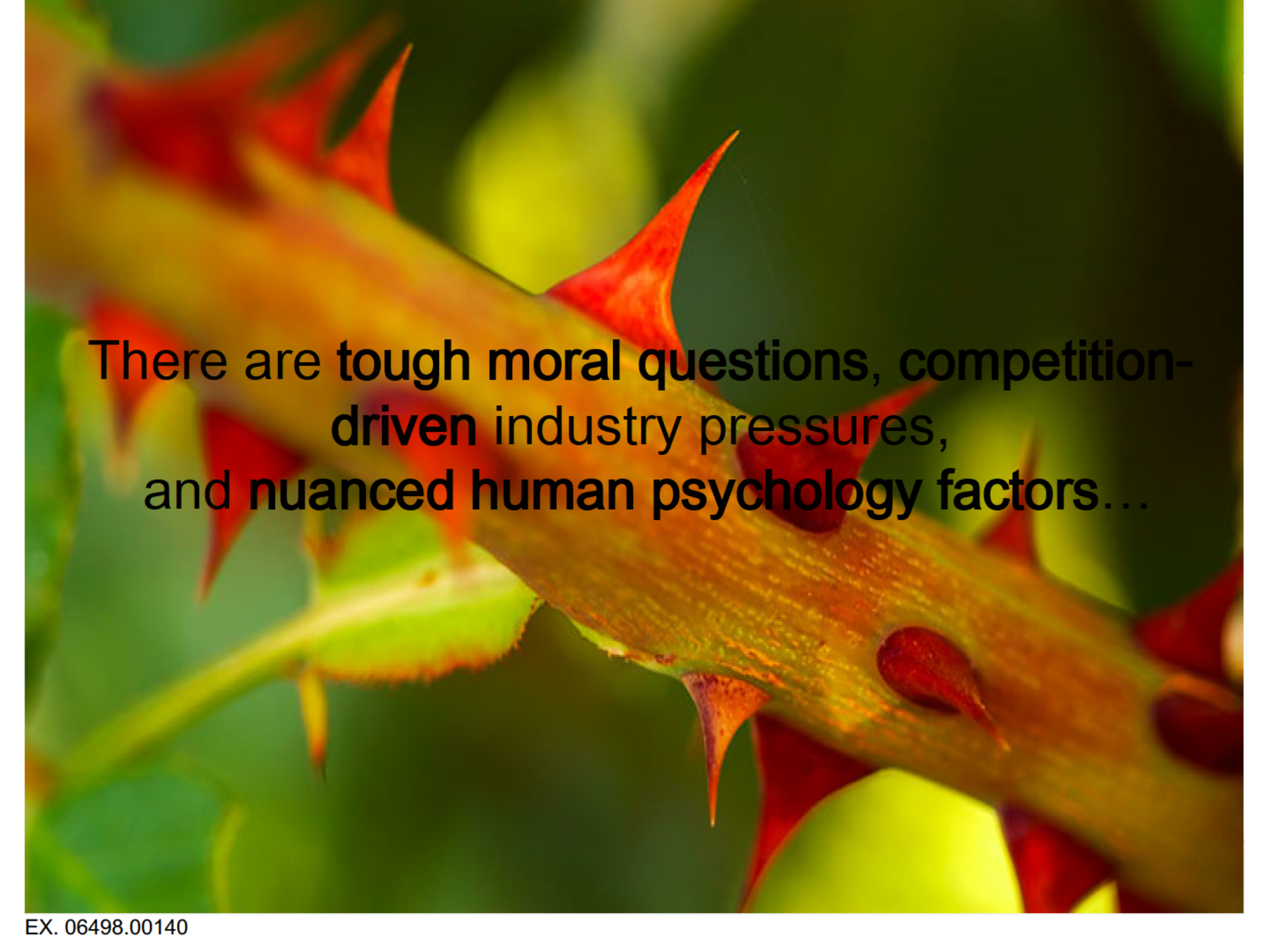


<http://timewellspent.io>

(certification, standards, ratings)



Clearly, these are thorny issues...



There are tough moral questions, competition-driven industry pressures, and nuanced human psychology factors...

A red rectangular button with rounded corners, containing the word "KENNEDY" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

KENNEDY

... but just like we had a team to
standardize our design *aesthetic* across
the company ...

Imagine if we had a team to
standardize our design *ethics* and
define best practices to minimize distraction.

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Breaking: BlackBerry Z10 review: a new life, or life support?

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PREVIOUS STORY

Apogee focuses on the iPad with updated One, Duet, and Quartet multichannel...

NEXT STORY

Lenovo may be a suitor for RIM's smartphone business

ANDROID APPS & SOFTWARE WEB & SOCIAL EXCLUSIVE FEATURE VIDEO

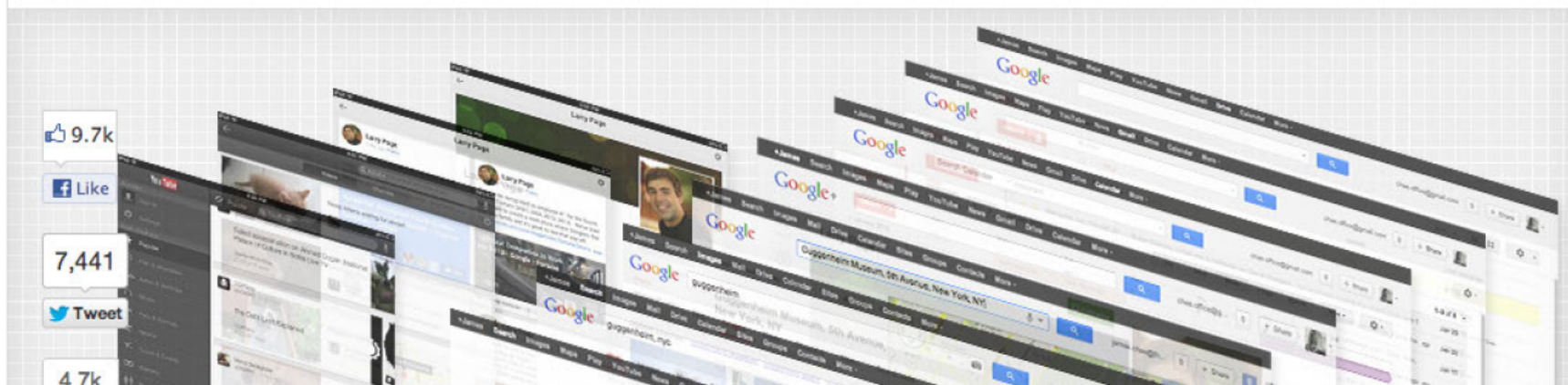
685

COMMENTS

Google's New Team Tackles Distraction and Consumer Well-Being

A new group is making sure Google's products aren't just great, but actually make people happy.

By **Verge Staff** on January 24, 2013 12:06 pm



But we can't wait any longer
to figure it out.

Join the Community:

Attention-Respectful Googlers

(...now 3,000+ Googlers and growing!)

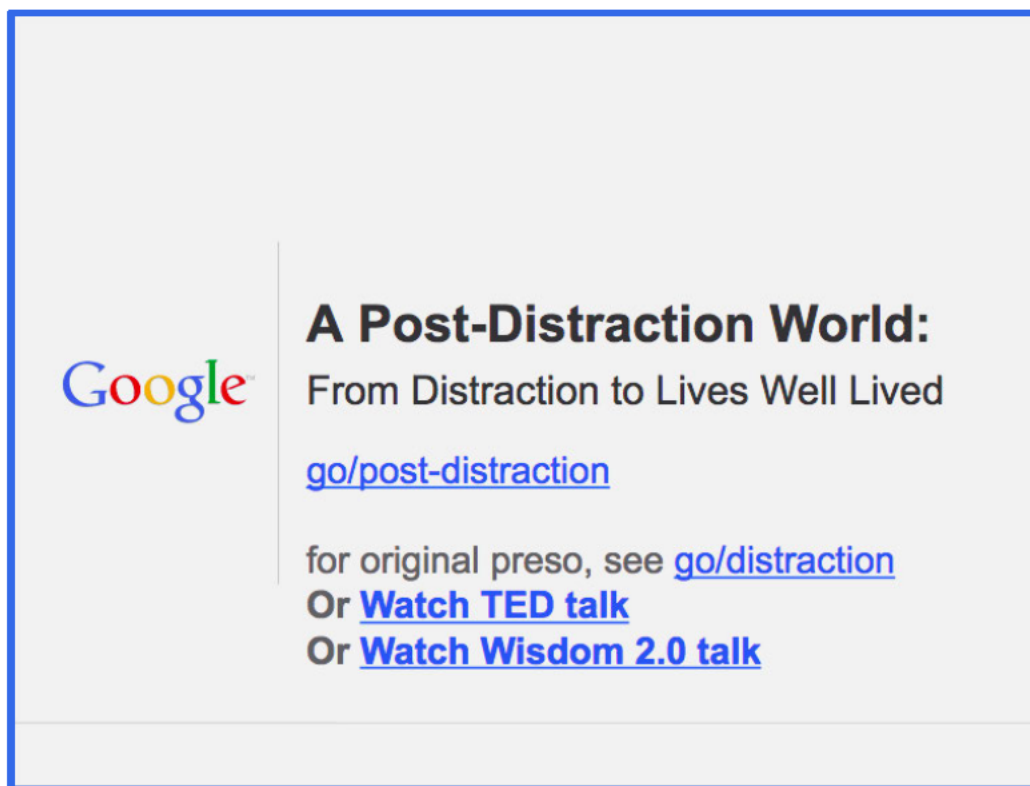
or visit:
[go/attention-respectful](https://www.google.com/go/attention-respectful)

Share this presentation with your co-workers... start a conversation!

[go/distraction](#)

Updated 8/1/2015:

See the [Post-Distracted World \(Solutions\) deck](#)



 **A Post-Distracted World:**
From Distraction to Lives Well Lived
[go/post-distracted](#)
for original preso, see [go/distraction](#)
Or [Watch TED talk](#)
Or [Watch Wisdom 2.0 talk](#)

[go/post-distracted](#)

Updated 2/1/2015:
Watch the Wisdom 2.0 talk: [go/distraction-talk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go/distraction-talk)



Appendix & Links

There's of great thinkers and experts who would be eager to help us work through these tough questions (from many different ages, backgrounds, genders)...

- BJ Fogg
- Linda Stone
- Kelly McGonigal
- Kathy Sierra
- Dan Ariely
- Daniel Kahneman
- Sherry Turkle
- Gloria Mark
- Neema Moraveji, Stanford Calming Tech lab
- Wisdom 2.0 conference
- Luciano Floridi (Oxford)

Many even at Google!

- Hal [REDACTED], Chief Economist @ Google
- John [REDACTED], author of "The Time Paradox"
- Joe [REDACTED] ("[Culture of Distraction](#)", partner at Google Ventures)
- Google Ideas

There are some great books, articles, etc on the subjects of Willpower, Ego Depletion, Habit formation, Addiction, Pleasure, Psychophysics, Free Will, etc:

- "The Illusion of Conscious Will" by Daniel Wegner
- "Amusing Ourselves to Death" by Neil Postman
- "Salt, Sugar, Fat" by Michael Moss
- "Thinking Fast And Slow" by Daniel Kahneman
- "Flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- "The Willpower Instinct" by Kelly McGonigal
- "Compass of Pleasure" by David Linden
- "Alone Together" by Sherry Turkle
- "[Diagnosis: Email Apnea](#)" by Linda Stone
- "[Is Twitter TOO Good?](#)" by Kathy Sierra
- "The Time Paradox: New Psychology of Time That Will Change your Life" by John Boyd and Philip Zimbardo