

## PRODUCTIVITY ROAD TEST

# The price of cold turkey

**Sue White** pays for the 'pleasure' of being temporarily disconnected from her internet service.

**N**ick Hornby says it's brilliant. Seth Godin rates it. Naomi Klein is a fan. Could turning the internet off be the key to productivity? Despite the web being just a tiny bit useful for things such as contacting colleagues, researching stories and perusing important websites such as [apartmenttherapy.com](http://apartmenttherapy.com), I'm the first to admit, the internet can also be a big, fat distraction when it comes to getting things done.

Happily, technology has now figured out how to release us from its own grip. Freedom is a simple program that cuts off a user's online access so they can get things done "away from the distractions of network connectivity".

Sure, unplugging the modem would do the same job, but lacking that high-end discipline, I head instead to [macfreedom.com](http://macfreedom.com) – despite the name, the program works on both Macs and PCs. Within 10 minutes I've paid my one-time \$10 fee, downloaded Freedom, and set my first web-free round to a modest 60 minutes. I'm promptly rewarded by a short message on my screen. "You are now offline." What? Now? Like, right now? What about all the poking around I wanted to do before easing myself into token bursts of web-free working?

Once Freedom kicks in, both Firefox and my web-based email appear tantalisingly functional, but clicking them proves fruitless. My technologically challenged brain fails to understand how this is possible, so I click some more.

Perhaps Freedom knows how to disable my email, but it won't have figured out I also have shortcuts on my toolbar. It has. I click to no avail. It's true. I've turned off the internet. **FOR ONE WHOLE HOUR.**

Eventually, I realise no amount of



Illustration: Kerrie Leishman

hitting buttons is going to bring the internet back. So instead I do as any technologically hamstrung writer would do. I procrastinate.

I get a cup of tea. I check my (dangerously connected) smartphone. I tidy my desk. I wonder why there is no countdown telling me that I only have 52 internet-free minutes to go. My computer looks exactly the same as it did eight minutes ago, but there's no internet connection.

I tidy my electronic desktop. Then, bingo: I discover a rich text file in the Freedom download folder saying

"read me". Handily, it concisely explains what I've just done.

I learn a few key things – all available on the program's website, for those who actually research these things before cutting off their connection to the outside world. I have up to eight hours of "freedom" at a time. If I can't hack it, I just need to restart my computer and I'm back online. If my computer goes to sleep, Freedom won't count this time. Developer Fred Stutzman appears scarily in tune with his users. Most importantly, I learn "when Freedom is running, it will appear non-

responsive. This is purposeful." A countdown, it seems, is simply another distraction.

Twenty-three minutes in and internet-free time continues creeping by ever so slowly. There is nothing left to tidy. I do what any technologically isolated writer with a clean load of laundry would do.

I start work.

**Sue White is a freelance writer focused on productivity, working sustainably and learning to love web-free working. Follow @suewhitewriter.**