



OFF THE BEATEN PATCH

By [Donna Lynn Rhodes](#) | [Email the author](#) | December 23, 2010

Opinion

Off the Beaten Patch: Is Social Media Making Us Less Social?

Is Facebook really our friend?

We used to start our day with a glass of orange juice and a bowl of Wheaties. No more. Logging on to the computer has become the breakfast of champions.

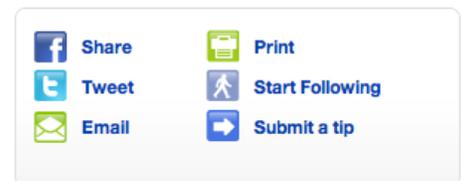
With my iPhone fully charged, I check what texts came in while I was sleeping. I glance at the green mail icon to see the number of new e-mails; then I look to see if it's my turn to make a move on Words with Friends. My first decision of the day -- do I text, answer and play, or do I eat, read and go for a run.

I definitely ignore Words with Friends. I used to open that first, but not any more. When I realized that I was taking my iPhone to the bathroom so I could play Words with Friends while sitting on the toilet, I knew it was time to join a 12-step program that knows the point value of the word "obsession." This app was taking over my life. Really. The triple-letter, double-word score on the word zymurgy wasn't worth 118 points and hemorrhoids.

So let's see. Texts. E-mails. Addicting apps — and we're just talking on my phone. All this tapping and swiping is just the start of what surely will result in a pandemic of carpal tunnel syndrome and future generations of social-media maniacs.

And then I open my laptop.

First, I check my business e-mail, then my personal e-mail. Next, I open Safari and go straight to Patch – read the top stories and check to see if anyone commented



on my columns. Then I check to see who's on Skype -- maybe there's a chance for a quick chat with my family and friends dotted across the country and the world.

Then comes Facebook.

Mark Zuckerberg, *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year," has indeed changed the way we live. And I am one of the 500 million users who are both innocent and guilty of being sucked into what is fast becoming the most unsocial social media. Hey, I just posted the link to this story on my wall and that makes me as guilty as the "friends" I'm about to criticize. So please, let me apologize in advance to all the "friends" I'm about to piss off – I'm sorry. I don't know, maybe it's a generation thing, but I'm not sure I'm totally on board with where the Zuckerberg Express is taking us.

As I write this, I have 257 friends on Facebook -- 90 of whom are coming off by the end of the week.

Facebook poses a real dichotomy. With one click it made my life better by reuniting me with my flatmates and loving friends from England. And it filled a huge void by putting me back in touch with my childhood friends from Chicago. I also love that I can keep up with my cousins, whom I get to see only once or twice a year.

There is so much on Facebook that I absolutely love. At the top of the list are all the photos. Photos of my friends, their kids, their parents, their reunions, their weddings, even their "vacation slides." I love the updates I get on *Mad Men*, *Big Love* and *Glee*. I look forward to seeing what goodies [Smitten Bake Shop](#) has just taken out of the oven or reading Pete Crooks' latest *Diablo* interview. And, of course, it's nice to have the chance to wish someone a happy birthday whose special day I might have missed.

Stop me if I'm wrong, but what I don't understand about Facebook is this: How can Amy have 1,508 friends, or Andy 1,292? Julie has 1,069 and Molly and Tom have 2,500 combined. How can they possibly have any semblance of a personal relationship with that many people? Collecting friends isn't like collecting baseball cards. And with your friends able to see just how many friends are in your big pile, I wonder if Facebook isn't fast becoming a popularity contest far worse than the students face every week at *Glee*'s McKinley High.

But that's my point. It's one thing to read a friend's post saying they just took a new job, but last week I read that my "friend" had a baby. "So what?" you ask. So I didn't even know she was pregnant. She will never notice when I "unfriend" her this week because she's too busy sending out new friend requests to everyone she met in the maternity ward. I love when Sherry writes "Happy Friday Everyone" but I absolutely cringed when I read someone else write "Happy Thanksgiving to my Facebook Friends." What the hell is that? It's like sending out a memo to your

staff. Because of Facebook there is yet another subcategory for friends. We have our real friends, our work friends, our family friends, our gym friends, our neighbor friends and now our Facebook friends. But are many of our Facebook friends just another way of saying there are people who aren't worth our time to actually spend time with or talk to in person?

What about the people who live five minutes away and post about how much fun they are having with their real friends and family and never think to ask you join them? Or what about friends who choose Facebook time over face-to-face time? We're all busy but we all make time for the people and things that are important to us. And I'm as guilty as the next person, feeling that all this texting, e-mailing, posting and tweeting is hindering our communication, not helping it. Facebook may save time, but it doesn't save face.

I'm not saying I want to go back to life before computers. I'm not an idiot. But I am nostalgic for a good yak on the phone or laugh over lunch. I miss meeting people with a handshake and signing my name with a pen.

The social network Mark Zuckerberg created is here to stay. For people in their 20s and 30s, Facebook is a way of life. Parents like it because it's a clever way of finding out what your kids are up to. Sadly for grandparents, Facebook is the only way to still feel part of their grandchild's life. And for the majority of us baby boomers, we are between a rock and hard drive.... Do we *want* to participate or do we *have* to participate?

Either way, it's time for me to log off.