

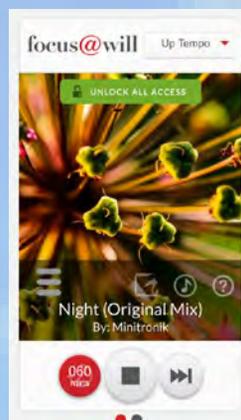
THE DIGITAL LIFE

By Kendra Wright

Chilling Out & Getting Focused

Let's face it. Very few of us would define ourselves as geeks. So you may wonder if you should skip right over this column.

I hope you won't!



Or you may be so busy that you may be thinking, do I really have time for this column?

I hope you do!

The Digital Life is all about integrating digital tools that will save you time and make your life better. It is for two kinds of people – let's call them the "uncomfortable but curious" and the "closet nerds." (Actual nerds need not apply.)

Let's get one thing straight. I think people who haven't bought into the idea that gadgets will save our lives are refreshing! Technology hasn't been 100% positive for our society. When I meet someone not on Facebook or who doesn't have a smart phone (which I've heard we should all just call "phones" now), I am fascinated!

However, in the spirit of inclusiveness, I want to admit that although I love the technologically challenged among us, I'm excited to introduce you to some digital gadgetry that I hope will improve your life!

As event producers, we're all so busy. (Although I'm not an event producer now, I started my career executing 14 events per year for a non-profit in Arkansas. I'm very busy now building websites for events, but I never quite feel the need for a cot in my office like I did when I was an event producer. So I understand how crazy your lives are!)

But I think the busy-ness of our jobs and the overall stress in our society leads

me to a constant journey for balance (I have come to feel balance is an illusion, but that's another story for another day). The busier we are, the more we may crave getting our jobs done so we can rest.

Although it may sound like an oxymoron, I want to tell you about some ways to use technology to get focused and to slow down and relax.

Simply Being

The first tool I want to tell you about is for meditation. You don't meditate, you say? Good, then you'll love this app! It is called Simply Being, and it has a one-time fee of \$1.99 in the app store. I heard about it when I asked my cousin, a doctor, about the latest medication for insomnia. You could have knocked me over with a feather when he recommended an app instead of a drug!

Do you ever feel like the more information that comes into your brain, the dumber you feel? The less able to actually recall information? Research is clear that the key to improving so many things about your health, including improving your memory and stress reduction, is actually slowing down your brain periodically so it can absorb. This is similar to in college when you were supposed to actually sleep after studying, so all that knowledge could assimilate in your brain.

To be honest, I could get hung up with petty issues with Simply Being. There

isn't a time I don't log in when I don't want to rebrand the whole app. I think they definitely spend their time meditating instead of on graphic design. But try it, and see if it doesn't give you a whole new appreciation of (and ability to) slow down your busy brain and relax.

Or maybe you don't have time to slow down, because you just need to get things done!

Focus@Will

The second tool I want to tell you about is called Focus@Will. Again, this app is based on science. It is instrumental music that is proven to increase your productivity by increasing your focus. There is a free 30-day trial, after which it is \$5.99/month, although they run lots of specials.

I find that this app does three things for me. First, I almost always listen to it with headphones in my office. And headphones help give the signal that you're busy, which will hopefully make you less likely to be interrupted. Secondly, in the trial, it gives you music in 60 minute increments, which is a doable duration to really focus and get something done. And thirdly, I think the music really does work in increasing productivity!

A brief diversion. What do you do the first thing every day in your office? I'll bet that you check email. But when you think about it, email is a reactive tool, and it almost never results in actually achieving

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your goals. So tomorrow, I challenge you not to open email until you've been in your office for one hour. Instead pick the most important thing you need to get done, and do it while listening to Focus@Will for one hour. I don't always do this, but when I do, I'm more productive, strategic and proactive. Let me know how it goes!

Sleep Cycle

The last tool I want to tell you about is to help you sleep and wake up better. Really, there's an app for that! This one is called Sleep Cycle, and it's the deal of the century at \$0.99 in the app store.

Let's talk about how Sleep Cycle wakes you up first. I find that the way I wake up can have a profound effect on my day. I despise a traditional alarm clock, and my goal is to go to bed early enough so I can wake up on my own. (Hey, a person can dream!) With Sleep Cycle, you enter in a half hour window (which you can vary to be longer or shorter) of when you want to wake up.

By sleeping with your phone by your pillow, Sleep Cycle senses when you're in the lightest sleep within that period (by how much you move and whatever other trickery they utilize), and it starts playing very gentle sounds (which you can choose) at that time. These sounds get louder if you don't turn it off, but let me tell you. If you have been using the BUUUUZZZZZZZZ of a traditional alarm, then you haven't lived until Morning

Mist or December Moon gently pull you toward wakefulness.)

You can customize whether you want your phone to vibrate, allow snooze, to turn off on weekends and more. You can even have it track your heart rate, tell you the weather when you wake and make your morning coffee. (See what I did there? I was seeing if you were paying attention... which you would be if you slept better!)

I'm pretty sure we can all get on board with waking up more gently. But here's where I may lose you if you don't have trouble sleeping. When you set an alarm in Sleep Cycle, it asks you for any "Sleep Notes" – these are things you've done in the day that might affect sleep – exercise, caffeine, alcohol, electronics before bed, sleep medicines you've taken, etc.

Then as you sleep, it tracks your sleep length and quality, so that over time, you can see how your behaviors affected your sleep. It's pretty amazing to see over time how your lifestyle choices affect sleep so that you can actually change them to sleep better! It even gives you a sleep quality percentage so the goal-oriented among us can aim for higher numbers!

One more thing about Sleep Cycle. You can go to sleep with white noise type sounds if you like, which I recommend. You can even have them fade out when you fall asleep... because it knows when that is!

I know Sleep Cycle may sound like TMI – Too Much Information! But if you think about it, technology is probably quite literally keeping us up at night.

I've even seen a recommendation to wear those blue blocker glasses they used to have infomercials for, to block out blue light from phones and TVs that keep us up at night. So why not use technology to do the opposite and actually help you sleep!

There you have it – three apps that can help you slow your brain, focus and sleep better. I hope you will give at least one of them a try, and let me know what you think! Next time, I'll discuss a different aspect of The Digital Life, and hopefully you'll be focused and rested enough to read it! Be well.

Kendra Wright started her career managing non-profit fundraising events. Then in 1995, as the internet came to being, she began doing online marketing, managing global Internet strategies at a Fortune 1000 technology company. In 1998, Kendra left that company to found, Wright Strategies, working with clients like KEEN Footwear, Jeep, Panasonic, Intel, Nike and Chrysler. Finally in 2009, Kendra launched Saffire Events to deliver software that makes it easy for events and venues to market themselves online. It's been a wild ride. Kendra can be reached at: kendra@saffireevents.com and more information about Saffire Events can be found at: www.saffireevents.com.