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# Digital Detox - Addressing the Issue of Screen Addiction in Millennials

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Digital Detox - Addressing the Issue of Screen Addiction in Millennials

by

Tyler Michael Hicks

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Fine and Performing Arts Scholars Program Honors College East Tennessee State University

Date

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis, the final coming together of my best work, to my parents: Shawn Hicks and Tammy Johnson, also known as the most loving, understanding, helpful, and supportive parents a kid could ask for. From never stopping me from following my passion of design from all the way back to my sophomore year of high school, helping financially and emotionally, and putting their children's needs before themselves and making sure we have all the tools possible to become the most successful people we possibly can, I hope this is a reflection of the skills and investments you have shown and given me.

# **ABSTRACT**

This conclusive study is based upon a project of a social awareness campaign designed to reduce screen time in older children and Millennials. This is achieved through the uses of all modern aspects of a campaign: posters, advertisements (social and print), as well as a trio of posters that explain the concept of the campaign. Lastly, this all pulls together with the intended use of both a microsite and mobile app.

#### **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

## **Research Questions and Goals**

## **The Origin Story**

This project encompasses a lot of things I am passionate about: data visualization, advertising (specifically in campaigns), vector art, and poster design. When I was first asked what I wanted to do for a project, I knew I wanted to do some form of advertising campaign. From the experience I gathered during my three years competing in the National Student Advertising Competition, I knew it was something I was incredibly passionate about, as well as something to portray as one of my strengths as a last "hoorah" from my time at East Tennessee State University.

Once I knew what I wanted to do from a broad standpoint, I had to find a problem to solve. I struggled with this concept for a long time, and honestly still cannot believe that I chose the route that I did. It came to me when discussing the idea with one of my classmates, and they would not take their eyes off their phone when speaking to me. This sparked an idea in my mind to address something that is heavily ignored in society and needs to seriously be addressed: screen addiction. While this campaign focuses mostly on smartphone screen addiction, the idea applies to all forms of screen addiction: mobile, desktop, television, et cetera. This then eventually became branded into Digital Detox.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of Digital Detox is simple: reduce screen activity in millennials and high-school level teenagers. This is accomplished through a few methods: print ads, visual infographics paired with an 'introduction' poster, a landing page loaded with information, and a

mobile application to enforce the goal of reducing screen time. All these pieces working together as a well-oiled machine have shown to be successful in visual cohesiveness as a campaign as well as successful in addressing the issue of screen addiction and providing multiple solutions to said problem.

#### Methods

The methods I used to successfully address the issue of screen addiction are as follows: a trio of posters (2 infographics, 1 introductory), 2 advertisement posters, a landing page, as well as a mobile app. These methods can all work separately, but when put together completely tie the campaign together and provide visual cohesion and more understanding of the campaign. Vector designed characters populate all parts of the campaign to influence people as well as give the campaign some visual movement and contrast. The goal of all these methods is to push viewers to the landing page and afterwards download the app on their smart devices. The app then monitors their screen activity and alerts them when they have been staring at their screen for prolonged amounts of time.

#### The Trio

The trio of posters is the centerpiece of the campaign in my opinion. They introduce the campaign as well as use the information-based graphics to persuade people that screen addiction is a serious issue and push society and to take a step back and look at it from a different perspective. The introductory poster introduces the campaign; it asks questions like "What is a Digital Detox?" and "How does this affect me?" effectively answering most questions people would have about getting involved with or following a campaign such as this one. This then

leads into the infographic posters; either direction being a way to go as there is no beginning nor end to viewing the campaign. The visual angles on the informative posters provide the idea that they "branch out" from the main poster, creating visual depth. The statistics listed on the infographic poster display major facts that are ignored daily, such as texting and driving accidents, "nomophobia", and the sheer amount of texts that are sent daily in the United States alone. While infographics remain a difficult way to convince someone to follow certain behaviors, I believe the most successful way to achieve this is to flood viewers with so much information that they cannot see any other perspective than the one the campaign is seeking to guide them towards. These posters are the biggest strength of this campaign, and the foundation of the rest of it. Without data visualization, there would not be a lot of convincing to do other than following maybe one of these ten paths I have set in place with these posters.



## **Figure 1 – Trio Posters**

#### **Advertisement Posters**

My advertisement posters follow a slightly different ideology than the infographic ones; they are clean, simple, and minimalistic. These posters are not meant to display much of any information, and I have successfully accomplished that. My intent with these advertisement posters is to spark interest into what exactly these posters are seeking to portray. With "weapons of mass distraction" and "pull the plug" there's a little to build together before understanding the big picture, but the basic idea is there.

The first poster discusses how phones are a major distraction in daily life. I chose to use one of my characters here to pin the 'distraction' on someone who is not the viewer and allow them to decide for themselves what issues are caused by these various media outlets. The applications used to display mobile phone screen addiction were: YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and Twitch. I aimed to address most of society and I believe it is safe to say that most people in the target audience use at least one of these applications if not all of them. At the bottom of the poster, it displays the name of the campaign as well as social media icons, leading people to the social media pages of Digital Detox. This raises the question: Why would you advertise on social media when you're attempting to get people to reduce the amount of time they spend on their screens? The answer is simple: social media advertising is not only one of the most successful forms of advertising, it is also where the desired target audience is for this campaign. Underneath the social media icons is the link to the landing page:

"www.digitaldetox.org".



Figure 2 – Weapons of Mass Distraction Ad Poster

The second poster is more of a relatable poster to the older section of the audience. It also displays most of the social media icons, as well as some popular browsing 'time-killing' websites. The visual here is that it displays as a text message would. The message sent (from the viewer) would be the icons of the social medias and websites, showing that is what their lives are revolving around. The response (from Digital Detox) is just a book. The catch here, however, is

that there are 'read receipts' underneath each message. This is a play on Apple's popular read-receipts, allowing someone to see what time you "read" their text message. Underneath the social media icons, it states "read: 30 seconds ago,". Underneath the book icon it shows "read: 3 years ago,". This plays off the fact that most people today do not read like they used to. I myself am a prime example of this as I could not say the last time I touched a book to read for pleasure. It really showed once I followed my own campaign's ideas and strayed from my screen as much as necessary; I started reading again!

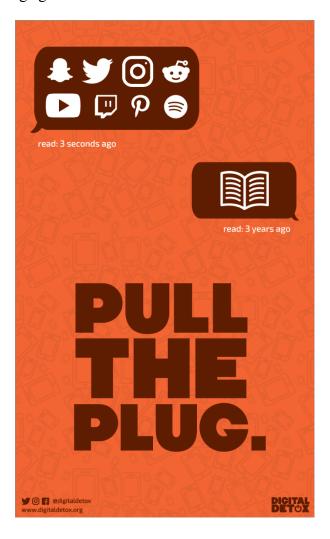


Figure 3 – Pull the Plug Ad Poster

These two posters prove to be successful in many ways. They address the issue at hand, both from a comedic and realistic standpoint. They also lead the viewer to the microsite, allowing them to get more involved with the campaign and learn even more. They are the two things that can probably work the best independently and do not gain much more strength when displayed with the campaign piece.

#### **Social Media Advertisements**

Social media advertisements were probably the most successful way to reach my target audience. Since people never get off their phones for just about anything, I knew social media was one thing my audience can never get enough of. If Digital Detox could get into that niche, it would get the attention it needs to succeed and provide messaging that screen addiction is a real thing and something that needs to be addressed properly so that we are not all engulfed by it in the years to come.

I chose to place advertisements in Facebook and Instagram. Both places receive a lot of attention when it comes to smartphone users and I figured that would be the most cost effective and efficient way to get the most attention towards the campaign. These advertisements will show the same forms of messages that the printed poster advertisements will, allowing the campaign to feel well-rounded and synonymous.

## Microsite

The microsite is where all the traffic is directed. It discusses what exactly Digital Detox is while allowing users to get even more involved with the campaign by donating, sharing

messages or social media posts, and even getting support to reduce screen time with alternative methods provided by vetted sources!

The site is used as a "single-page scroller". The parallax scrolling effect helps guide the user down the page, where each widget helps explain the different aspects of the campaign. The first widget that is displayed is the homepage. It simply welcomes the users with some of my characters and displays the campaign name along with the mission statement: "Improving the next generation of tech users, one detox at a time." At the bottom of this first widget, there is a "Who are we?" button, opening the door into the introduction of the campaign.

The next widget is entitled "About Us". It essentially tells the story of the campaign by explaining its goals and methods:

"We focus on providing healthy, alternative methods to helping people get off their smart devices, such as utilizing application limitations like the Screen Time app on iOS and Android. For even more help, the Digital Detox app will alert you when your screen time goes above average!"

This helps the viewer understand the true goal of the campaign as well as introduce them to the app from the get-go. However, most people are skeptical to get involved at first glance if they are incredibly deep into their screen addiction; this leads into the next widget.

The "Pull the Plug" widget is up next; it is the real lasso into the campaign. This widget is where the campaign is really sold; from explaining what screen addiction is, talking about the many different methods to get off your device, and pushing the app, it really does it all. This widget shows two characters who appear to be texting each other within a few feet of each other. From being able to explain the real dangers of screen addiction and provide real, proven solutions, this widget is what makes or break a new follower of Digital Detox.

Lastly are the contact and support widgets. Both widgets are located side-by-side as they are just ways the viewer can support the campaign, whether it be a monetary donation or contacting the people in charge of the campaign to provide input or just thank them for everything they do. These two methods are primarily what helps Digital Detox stay afloat financially as a nonprofit.

The microsite is essentially the middle-man of the Digital Detox's entire operation. It is where all traffic is directed but then it itself leads users onto the app, the final destination of reducing one's screen time successfully. This funnel-based method seemed to be the most successful way of "catching the most flies", by providing the buckshot method of applying the issue to literally everyone in the demographic then flowing them into the website and then onto the app. I believe this microsite successful portrays the campaign in a good light and successfully influences people to get more involved with Digital Detox by downloading the app.

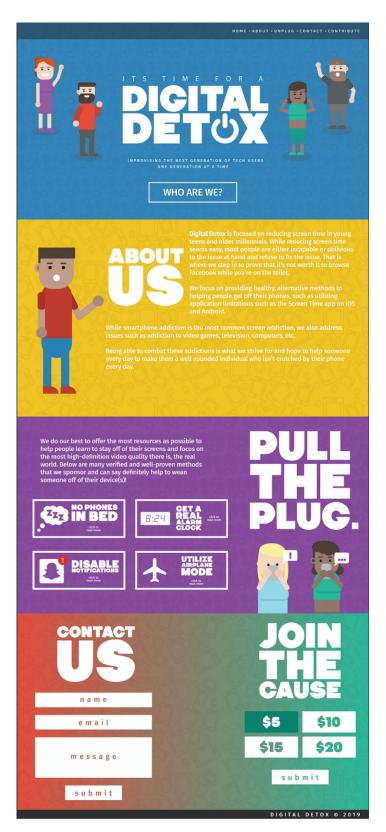


Figure 4 – Microsite

## **Mobile App**

The biggest problem faced with screen addiction is how readily available it always is, and nobody is ever held accountable for how much time they spend on their device because everyone does it! The main goal of the app is to influence people to spend less time on their devices by sending push notifications when someone's screen time is going above average. The main way functions by tracking users' average screen time per day over the course of a week. Thereafter, it would begin to set goals to reach such as only spending X amount of time on your device per day, until you hit a healthy average of time per day spent on your device! This is achieved by sending a daily notification consisted of a graphed daily usage of apps and screen time. This compares to the day before, week before, and even year before, showing users their progress over time!



Figure 5 – App Screen Home



Figure 6 – App Screen Breakdown



Figure 7 – App Screen Methods



Figure 8 – App Screen Settings

This app would be obviously be free in order to remove any monetary barriers that would prevent someone from wanting to treat their screen addiction. The use of characters on each of the daily displays helps the user feel that they are doing well for not only themselves but also the characters! As stated in the introductory poster: "This movement is not about banishing phones, laptops, the internet, et cetera." The goal of Digital Detox is not about removing screen time, just reducing it! If a user even limits their screen time by 3% over time with the Digital Detox app, that is a major success not only health-wise, but also socially!

#### **Characters**

Lastly, all aspects of the campaign use the individually crafted vector characters when discussing Digital Detox and its methods. This allows people to relate more to the statistics and not feel that they do not apply to their lifestyle. I tried to accomplish this by making each character appeal to at least one type of personality: the stubborn ignorant, the overactive social media user, the abusive Facebook poker, et cetera. Most people can identify with at least one of the characters in the campaign, making them understand that screen addiction affects more people than not.

#### **CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH**

## **Backing Up the Big Idea**

## **Research Topics**

To begin my research, I had to figure out exactly which topics to focus on, and how to go about researching them. I had to figure out who I was talking to through these applications, what methods were the most successful in reaching said audience, and finally what exactly I intended to talk about directly within those methods. With this archaic tree of research, I set out to find everything I needed.

## **Target Audience**

To start out, I needed to know who exactly I was going to communicate with through this campaign. I knew from the start it was going to be my peers and people younger than myself, but I dug to see who was the guiltiest of being addicted to tech and screens in our society. The first google response I got told me the answer. When looking for "screen addiction statistics" almost all the articles I came across talked about teenagers and their massive addiction to their smartphones. While my campaign did not specifically follow smartphones, even though they play a major role in screen addiction, I carried on figuring out exactly what these younger audiences were battling.

The first article I came across, sourced from San Diego State University, talks about a study that shows how unhappy teens addicted to their screens are. In a quote from Jean M. Twenge, "The key to digital media use and happiness is limited use" (Twenge). This immediately opened my eyes to how badly this problem needed to be addressed. Thinking back,

I had not seen anyone successfully address this issue; it almost seemed like everyone had given up on fighting this travesty.

I then came across a website called Common Sense Media. Their target audience is slightly younger than mine, toddlers to teens, but they address the same issue, screen addiction. They have been tackling this epidemic for years now and have a complete archive of guides for parents who do not want their children to fall into the same hole that so many others have. They talk about every possible thing a parent would want to know about a child on tech, apps, books, games, movies, TV shows, et cetera. The list goes on and on and this group never stops pumping out media every time a new thing comes out that can consume a child's attention span and mind as a whole.

Moving on, I looked for data that helped address the target audience I was after: millennials. In an article on Map Health Management by Thomas Kimball, he states that "According to the United States Census Bureau, there are now 83.1 million millennials in the United States representing one-fourth of the population" (Kimball). That alone showed me that the audience I am after will show the most potential when it comes to talking about an issue that impacts a possible majority of the country.

This same article goes in-depth about screen addiction, more specifically internet addiction, and discusses that even though fifty-five percent of experts in tech-based fields agreed that by 2020, millennials being connected through everything would yield positive results, they believe that the negative impacts will most definitely have a bigger effect on millennials than any of the positive impacts would (Kimball).

Dr. Kimball also makes an incredibly good point when he discusses a major relation between millennials and their tech reliance: stress. Stress is something that a lot of millennials battle with, whether they are just getting into college, getting out of college, going through hard times, or adjusting to living alone, the list goes on and on; in the end, everyone feels comfortable when hiding behind their screens. Not that screen addiction is a healthy stress-coping mechanism, but that it is just as bad as alcoholism, drug addiction, et cetera (Kimball).

After all the research was compiled, I headed deeper into the cavern of information behind the causes and solutions to screen addiction. My biggest question at this point was "How am I going to most effectively reach these people?" There are so many ways a campaign could try to reach an audience, whether it is digital, print, mail, and many other methods. I had to decide the best course of action for delivering this information and the most relevant information to deliver in the first place. With that, I dove into advertising campaigns to figure out to determine the most effective approach.

## **Methods of Approach**

Before even figuring out the strongest methods to research, I knew from my experience in the National Student Advertising Competition that most campaigns have the same general construction and assets: print, digital, social media, and so on. The direction to head in was clear, but I knew I wanted to take a different approach to the standard advertising campaign since if it worked with screen addiction before, most of us would probably not still be addicted.

This research journey was probably the most enjoyable I have ever experienced. Looking at different social campaigns, learning the ins and out, and deciding what paths were proper for me. For starters, I knew I wanted posters to play a major role in the campaign as they were a strong suit for me design-wise and gave the campaign an older feel to it as poster advertising is

not as common as it once was. I also knew this campaign needed to involve social media, so that was thrown into the mix.

In my research, I came across a post on Business2Community written by Alexandra Heseltine. She talks about the many different tactics used to reach potential customers. In that she lists just about every method one could possibly think of to advertise a campaign and attract new people to get involved or support. I saw many things on here that I did not even know were methods; while there was not much information to take away from this, there was a lot to take away from Heseltine's article.

Other than confirming the basics of my methods and knowing how they work best, I wanted to do some more research on infographics and data visualization. I knew most of this campaign was going to rely on statistics and I needed a way to visualize that without losing the audience in the message. In a Forbes article written by Cheryl Connor, she says "Why do infographics work? Because 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual according to the report, and visuals are known to improve learning and retention by 400%" (FORBES REFERENCE). Infographics are dominating the information game; companies rely on them to convey information without losing the attention of the reader and it works amazingly. I knew this was going to be the most successful way to grab the attention of the viewers as most of them have trouble paying attention to anything in the first place. This proved that infographics were one of the pillars of the campaign and the foundation for its methods.

These tactics showed me that not only could I just do what I thought would be best for the campaign, this idea could embody just about every tactic that has been used in advertising a campaign. While my project does not have all these tactics, it is relieving to know that if this went full scale, it could easily use all those methods. I decided on my main ways to produce this

campaign: printed poster ads and infographics as well as a microsite. The app, however, was something I felt should be included in the campaign as there's no better way to reduce someone's screen time than if they hand over the permission to monitor and remind them how much screen time they are using. Now that I knew the essential tactics I wanted to use for Digital Detox, I had to dive into the meat and potatoes of my campaign: the statistics and facts.

## **Intellectual Property**

One of the many challenges I would face in this campaign is being able to not only use logos from companies like Snapchat, Instagram, Twitch, et cetera. These companies have intellectual property of these logos, and being able to use them would either cost Digital Detox a lot of money or would take a lot of convincing to be able to use this property. This introduced a major challenge that I had not thought about before, and required some thinking outside of the box as Digital Detox most likely could not afford to pay to use all of these company's logos. I then came to the conclusion that would be the best option for not only my campaign but also my campaign's wallet.

Digital Detox's best option in this scenario would be to partner up with not only these companies but others like it such as Time to Log Off. This could start a charge for these companies to allow the use of their logos in the advertisements against screen addiction. The biggest card I would hold in this negotiation is the fact that my target audience is health-driven. Being able to play off of the fact that screen addiction is very unhealthy and causes things like anxiety and depression would put these companies in a bad light. That kind of negative attention would very much hurt these company's reputations. This type of leverage is what I believe will aid in the permission to use the logos for the companies that I did in my campaign.

#### **Facts & Statistics**

Diving into the facts and statistics of this campaign, there is a lot of information to take in all at once, so there were many times where I had to toss out data that would not seem logical or benefit my campaign, and put useful information over others, as I simply could not fit in all in the space I wanted to use. I determined that I would have a focus on smartphone addiction as it is the most common form of screen addiction, while also keeping into account that screen addiction covers all technology. With that in mind, I took a deep dive into the many pages of the Google page results and had my pen and paper ready.

To say I got a lot of information is an understatement. When coming across just the first few articles from BankMyCell and Forbes, I learned that this stuff is nothing to be taken lightly; it impacts most Americans and especially my target audience. BankMyCell says that the list of negative impacts smartphone addiction can have are as follows: anxiety, stress, narcissism, depression and loneliness, attention deficit disorder, and sleep deprivation (BankMyCell). And their statistics worked perfectly for the message I was trying to get across. For example, "80% of smartphone users check their phone within waking or going to sleep. 35% will do so within five minutes" (BankMyCell).

The Forbes article by Brian Scudamore discusses how people can overcome smartphone addiction, something my campaign hopes to provide to its viewers. A good way he described that was "Dealing with smartphone addiction starts by hacking our internal operating systems. Ask a trusted friend to change your email password over the weekend, or your social media passwords during the work day. Use a website blocker app on your browser to prevent you from using distracting sites when you need to be productive" (Scudamore). Just some of these methods alone were helpful in aiding my research towards finding the best solution to screen addiction.

I continued, looking for more statistic-based approaches to curb screen addiction and came across Time to Log Off. This website discusses the plethora of methods that screen and internet addiction affects people and provides data proving that. A major fact that showed me that this truly is an epidemic is "Gaming addiction is to be listed as a mental health condition for the first time in 2018 by the World Health Organisation" (ItsTimeToLogOff). Another thing that I wanted to touch base on in my campaign that they discuss is someone's mental health during screen addiction; it just gave me more proof as to how bad screen addiction is. From anxiety to depression and everything in between, this type of addiction seems to destroy people worse than drugs or alcohol ever could. Time to Log Off gave me of tons of information, all accredited, which was a major asset in my research.

The last place that gave me most research assets is Rewire. More specifically an article titled "This is What Digital Addiction Looks Like". In this article, Marguerite Darlington discusses the transition between regular tech use and when it eventually is determined to be an addiction. In her article she quotes "Technology use crosses the line when a person starts to experience functional impairments, in that the use is taking time away from important responsibilities such as work, family and social life," Sawchuk said" (REWIRE REFERENCE). Hearing about what separates technology addiction to regular use, it was very beneficial to my project so that I do not confuse screen addiction with regular day-to-day use. This wrapped up my research and I had enough information to start to build together my campaign, so that's exactly what I was going to do next.

#### **CHAPTER 3. CREATIVE PROCESS**

## The Climb to a Successful Campaign

## The Importance of a Creative Process

Following a creative process allows for an outside viewer to understand how an artist gets to the point they've gotten to. It allows one to sit in the mind of the designer and follow the creative steps in their work. For my campaign specifically, it shows that I started with something that did not feel like a true, real-world concept and that I eventually made my way into something that could easily be visualized in the real world. From my own standpoint, viewing a creative process allows me to investigate the past and understand the paths I took when it came to designing this campaign and lets me see ways I could have made things better or done certain things better.

## **Digital Detox's Creative Process**

For starters, I began creating my style by focusing on the infographic portions of the campaign. Not only was it something I was already good at doing, it gave me a lot of direction for the rest of the campaign. When I began creating a style for Digital Detox, I stuck to solid colors with text and very basic icons:

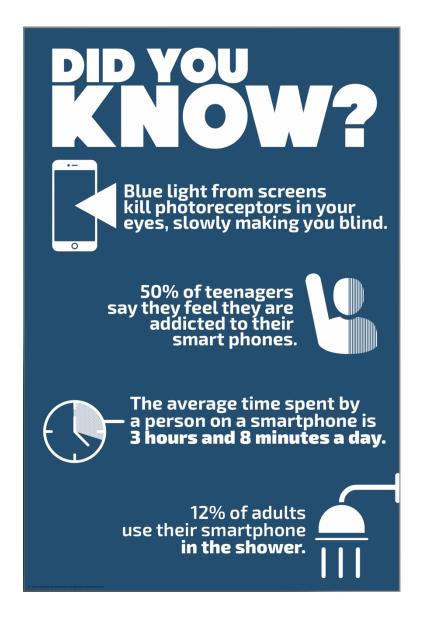


Figure 9 – Infographic Poster Phase 1

From this point I knew I was nowhere near what I wanted the campaign to look like, but I had a layout for how the infographics would play off each other and display the content.

After this I met with people to get critiques on the idea and style; while people basically understood the concept of the infographics, there wasn't much relation to people. I also got a lot of comments about the dullness of the color. This scheme would not get the attention of someone

walking by or looking at the poster; I needed eye-grabbing colors that drew the audience in, followed by graphics that keep them drawn in to read the data.

My second go-around with the infographic poster brought out some better aspects of the campaign that stayed; I created a pattern to create some depth and filled up the negative spaces. On top of that, I attempted to make the icons a little more relatable by giving them more natural shapes as well as some accessories to make them seem more human-like. I chose a brighter color to use for the background and added more statistics to keep the attention of the viewer for longer. Lastly, I added social media profiles and the microsite to the bottom of the poster to drive traffic to another point of the campaign.

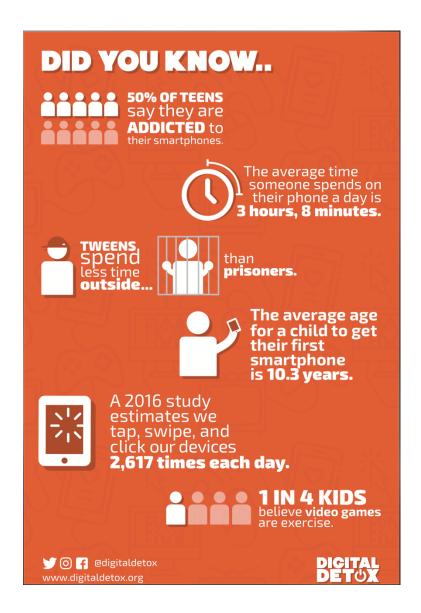


Figure 9 – Infographic Poster Phase 2

The color scheme was perfect; people loved it and I believed that I was nearing a finished style. However, I was very wrong; upon receiving my second round of critiques from professionals in the field I came to understand I still had a problem: my infographics were not relatable in any way other than stick figures. I had to address this problem or else my whole campaign would fall apart. I then ran into a piece of motivation that changed everything. In an infographic by an unnamed artist on a graphic design website, where real characters fall into

place of the information, letting people relate to them more. I then created the characters seen in my final product.

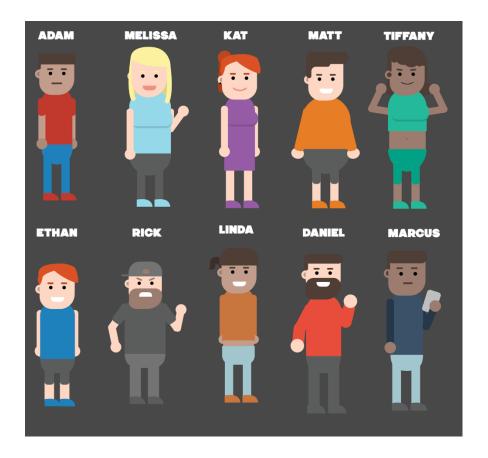


Figure 10 – Characters

These ten characters allowed the campaign to be relatable to nearly every personality I could think of. It allowed the campaign to open to the full spectrum of the audience and bring as many people into it as I possibly could. These characters got involved with the rest of the campaign and tied everything together, giving it cohesion to the highest possible extent. I believe without these characters my campaign would lose a lot of connection with the audience and a lot of the information I give would be lost by people who do not feel related to the issues at hand.

I then realized the best way to draw people into the campaign beyond vivid characters; I needed a strong color scheme that was all different but helped to tie the poster series together. I then came up with this concept as well as applying some minor rotation to almost create an optical illusion and make people think the posters were crooked; this just helps to keep the viewer's attention for the longest time possible and hopefully allow the information given to draw them in even more. This all combined to create my final infographic posters:

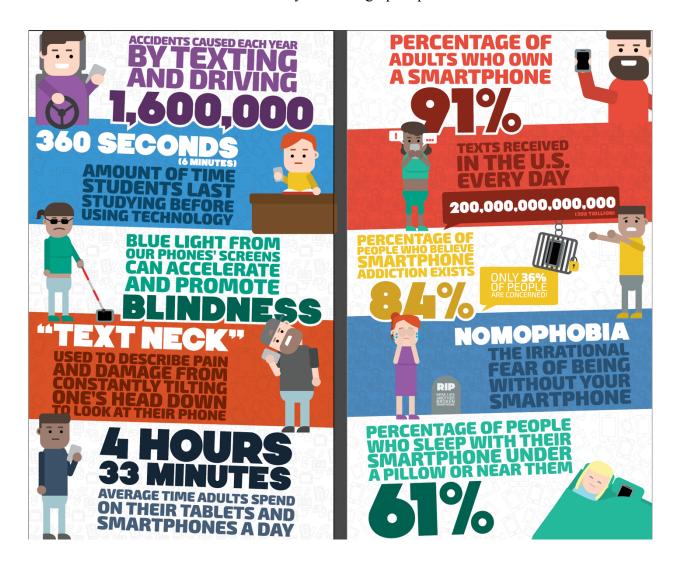


Figure 11 – Infographic Poster Phase 3

My introductory poster only had 2 main stages of production. I took the same style my infographics had and applied it to my first round of the poster. This very hard-edged version of the infographic poster did not read well and needed a lot of care to get to the point where I would be comfortable putting it up to present.

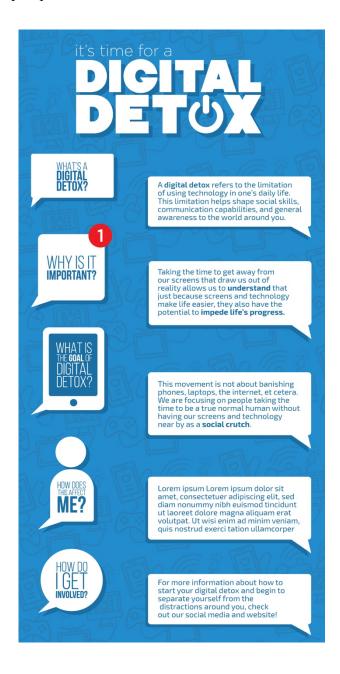


Figure 12 - Intro Poster Phase 1

After getting the complaints on this one, I took it a step further and removed the icons for the questions and duplicated the style of my infographics where I let my characters do the talking for each question. This led to the final production of the introductory poster.



Figure 13 – Intro Poster Final

This process led me into the final pieces of my campaign: the microsite, advertisement posters, and the app. I branded the same style over the rest of these pieces which resulted in a cohesive, easy-to-read campaign that properly addresses all the issues of screen addiction and the case by which it can be addressed by society. Once everything came together properly, I was able to step back and take it all in, and it was just the way I would want it to be: perfect.

## **CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION**

To wrap things up, this project was honestly one of the most successful projects I have independently completed, and I think that without this project I would not be as strong of a designer as I am now. Being able to look back and understand why I made the decisions I did, knowing how to make my work stand out even more, and being able to expand my color palette choices helped round me out as a designer all around. I knew when I started this project that I wanted to address a real-world problem that everyone has struggled with themselves. I think I successfully accomplished that with the branding and creation of a full social awareness campaign called Digital Detox.

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