

How do I ignore thee, let me count the ways...

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It used to be “you never call.” Now it’s you never call, you never e-mail, you never Tweet, you never Blackberry, you never blog, you never accept my LinkedIn invites, you never post on my Facebook wall, you never join my community on MySpace. Let’s face it, social media tools are just giving us more different ways to ignore each other. Not replying to a Facebook poke is the Web 2.0 version of checking your caller ID and letting it ring if you don’t want to talk to cousin Domenic.

You’d think that the opposite would be true. The cornucopia of communications widgets today gives us so many options for keeping in touch that there must be a personal Rosetta stone for each of us out there somewhere, some single solution to our need to reach out and touch someone. Yet every time another social network tool comes along, I see it less as another way to stay in touch than as one less excuse for not doing so.

The issue with me – and I suspect a lot of people – isn’t the avenue of communication, it’s finding time to use them. E-mail, text message, MySpace, at their base they’re all just paper letters in electronic drag. Yeah, commenting on a friend’s blog post is a great way to say “yo, I’m still alive and I see you are too. Imagine that?” LinkedIn is a great way to build up a network of contacts. But you really want to impress me? Find me a social networking tool that adds 10 minutes to my day every time I use it.

Not being delusional enough to think that’s going to happen – unless Facebook finds a way to pierce the time/space continuum – I see the real value in the variety of social media as, well, the variety itself. No one social media tool (which includes e-mail) can help me keep in touch with everyone I want to, but each social media tool I use plays a different role in my communication life, each filling a different crack in my day. I can’t have extended online chats on weekdays, but I can Tweet a few lines here and there to let my friends know I haven’t retired to a mountaintop to write bad haiku. I can’t always reply to all my relatives’ e-mail, but I can put new pictures of my daughter on my Facebook profile. Now if I could just find a social networking tool that will call my mother three times a week ...