

A close-up, slightly angled view of a clock face. The numbers 11, 12, and 1 are prominent in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Red tick marks indicate the minutes. The clock has a white face and a black rim. A green rectangular box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing the title text.

The 5 Most Common Time Wasters at Work and What You Can Do About Them

Content

1. Time wasters: What's that?	3
2. The 5 Most Common Time Wasters	5
2.1 Emails.....	5
2.2 Smartphones	6
2.3 Colleagues and background noise	6
2.4 Phones	7
2.5 Meetings.....	7
3. Bonus: Time wasters at home.....	9
3.1 Family and other household members	9
3.2 Household chores and pets	10
3.3 Social media, tv and gaming.....	10
4. How to identify time wasters with InLoox.....	11

1. Time wasters: What's that?

According to a [study](#) by online learning platform Udemy, three quarters of employees are occasionally distracted at work. 62% of respondents spend about an hour a day looking at their phones. These workplace distractions don't just have a negative impact on productivity. 54% say that because of distractions they aren't performing as well as they should. 20% even say that they aren't able to reach their full potential or aren't able to advance in their career because of it.

What about you - can you actually still say with full conviction that you are always focused on your work? Or do you regularly have the feeling that you can never fully concentrate on a task? Do you also often ask yourself at the end of the working day what you have actually accomplished?

Then you should get started now and identify your own personal time wasters. Find out how to do this in this whitepaper. We also provide an overview of the most common time wasters with helpful practical tips so that you can contain them and develop individual solutions. In

Time wasters are activities that prevent you from investing your time in the important tasks.



some cases, it is advisable to make use of technical tools or tricks. When used correctly, they can help you become more productive in your day-to-day work and in your projects.

Everyone is talking about time wasters these days, and countless articles with tips and advice on time management are floating around the internet. But what exactly are time wasters? Of course, time wasters don't sit under your desk and eat up your time. However, they do cause you to not utilize your available time as you should or would like to. Time wasters are activities that prevent you from investing your time in the important tasks.



2. The 5 most common time wasters

In today's digital and highly connected business world, professionals are faced with a multitude of distractions. Whether digital, such as email, social media or the internet, or analog, such as gossip with colleagues, unstructured meetings or background noise - all these distractions come at the expense of already very scarce working hours. At the same time, private conversations with colleagues are considered a distracting factor by 38 percent of respondents to a [study](#) conducted by vouchercloud. Other distracting factors are checking social media (47 percent) and the use of private messenger services (27 percent). In an [Oxford Economic study](#) 53 percent of respondents say that ambient noise reduces their satisfaction and productivity.

2.1 Emails

Employees spend around 7.5 hours a week, almost an entire workday, writing and reading work-related emails. What's the reason for that? Of course, we get a lot of emails over the course of a week, and yes, we should deal with them in a timely manner. But we often let our inbox "hold us hostage." The constant checking of emails robs us of our concentration and prevents us from focusing on one task at a time.

We often fall into the next trap. We interrupt our actual task as soon as we receive an email and deal with the newly received inquiries or work assignments first. Afterwards, we usually have no idea where we left off and it takes a while to get back to the original task. This constant task hopping coupled with a passive and reactive approach are especially detrimental to our concentration and productivity. So what can you do about it?

*We often let our inbox hold us
hostage.*



Turn off pop-up notifications!

Turn off pop-up email notifications to avoid constantly being pulled out of your tasks. If you use Microsoft Outlook, do the following:

1. Click on *File >> Options* to open Outlook Options.
2. A new window will open. Here, switch to *Emails* in the menu area on the left.
3. Scroll down to the *Inbox* section. Here uncheck all notifications for when new messages arrive.
4. Click *OK* to save the changes and restart Outlook if necessary.

Define specific time slots for mails!

If you can arrange your schedule yourself, then define fixed time slots for dealing with emails. For example, check your emails once in the morning, at noon and at the end of the workday.

Set up folders for important mails!

If you are afraid of missing important mails from your boss, partners or customers, create a dedicated folder for them. With the help of an Outlook rule, emails from these contacts will be automatically routed to the folder. You can check this folder regularly in between, e.g. after completing a task. How to create a rule in Microsoft Outlook:

1. On the *Home* tab, click *Rules* in the *Move* section.
2. Select *Create New Rule*.
3. At the bottom right, open the advanced options and check *"that comes from First Name Last Name"*. Then in the 2nd step click on the name, of the person and select from the address book all the people whose emails should be moved to the new folder. Click *Next*.

4. Select the action *"Move them to the Destination folder"*. In the 2nd step, click *Destination Folder* and select the folder and click *OK*.
5. Under *Select folder*, select the destination folder e.g. *Important emails*.
6. Then click *Finish*.



Describe tasks clearly!

Together with your colleagues, define a few rules for work assignments via email. In the first email, it should be clearly stated who has to do what and by when. You will then no longer accept vague assignments without a deadline. In addition, tasks should not be sent to a complete mailing list, but directly to the person who is to carry out the task.

Reduce mailing lists!

Make sure that your email address is only in the mailing lists that are relevant to you. No one needs to be kept in the loop about everything; that's what cross-departmental meetings and status updates are for. There's no point in being kept up to date on every little issue via email if you're not involved in the project in question at all. For example, it is completely irrelevant for a marketing employee to be on the internal mailing list of the engineering department.



Extend out-of-office notice for people outside of your organization!

Have you experienced this: You return from vacation and the phone rings endlessly? Everyone is already checking in on the first day of your return? Give yourself one day after your vacation until you are available again for outsiders. That means you openly communicate internally the correct date of your return, but extend your vacation by one day in the out-of-office notice for outsiders. Then you can work through the accumulated emails and not be overwhelmed by phone calls on your first day back.

2.2 Smartphones

Private cell phones are also a frequent disruptive factor at work and steal valuable working time.

How can you prevent private messages from WhatsApp, Telegram & co. from interrupting you during work?

Turn on the do-not-disturb mode!

With the help of the do-not-disturb mode, you can set a specific time during which you do not want to be interrupted at work. During this predefined period, your phone will now remain silent. Of course, this is not possible for everyone. Parents or employees who take care of relatives in need of care must always be available for emergencies. Of course, it can also happen

that you are expecting an important private call. However, if this is not the case, do-not-disturb mode is a helpful way to prevent your smartphone from interrupting your workflow.

Get it off your desk!

When the cell phone is right next to us on the desk, we reach for it much more quickly than if it were well tucked away in our pocket or backpack. So put your cell phone away during work hours. Then, during your lunch break, you can always check your private messages. And you'll see you've missed much less than you expected.

2.3 Colleagues & background noises

Regular interruptions due to comments or queries from colleagues, are sometimes a big distraction factor. If we are constantly pulled out of our workflow, we end up needing double the time to finish a task, as we always have to refocus on the task at hand. A [study](#) found out that it takes over 23 minutes for workers to get back on track after being distracted.

Distractions from colleagues are usually more difficult to stop. Of course, you can hardly block important queries without which the colleague cannot continue working. Unlike the smartphone, very few colleagues can simply be ignored. Nevertheless, there are a few signals that you can send:

Noise-cancelling headphones!

Get yourself headphones that block out ambient noise. Not only is this beneficial in open-plan offices, but it's also an important signal to colleagues. You will find that you are less likely to

be disturbed with your headphones on than without. This is because the headphones also make your colleagues more aware that they are actually interrupting you while you are doing something important.

Look for a quiet place!

For important tasks that require full concentration, retreat to focus rooms - if your organization offers them. But even without a focus room, you still have retreat options. Set your phone to "Do not disturb," close the office door and hang up a "Do not disturb" sign. If you don't have a private office, give your colleagues a quick heads-up that you don't want to be disturbed for the next hour if possible and put on your headphones. It doesn't matter whether you listen to music or use the headphones exclusively as a signal and to reduce noise.

2.4 Phones

Constant phone ringing also affects concentration negatively. These unpredictable interruptions cause you to lose valuable time.

Activate the do-not-disturb mode!

As mentioned in the previous section, you should

use your phone's do-not-disturb mode from time to time. This will ensure that the phone does not ring constantly during an important task.

Arrange a callback!

Are you in the middle of a project and a call comes in that could take longer? Then arrange a callback with the caller. Finish the current task first. Then you can devote yourself fully to the caller's issue.

2.5 Meetings

According to a study by management consultants Bain & Company, managers spend around 7,000 hours a year in meetings. If we then add the preparation and follow-up times, meetings account for a considerable part of the total number of work hours a week. Meetings are therefore often the ultimate time wasters - 60% of the Udemy respondents said that „meetings are just another distraction from the work they need to complete“. You're probably familiar with those days when you rush from one meeting to the next and wonder at the end of the working day whether you've done anything productive at all that day.



Limit the time!

We know from many areas of life that we are usually much more productive under time pressure than with unlimited time. Limiting time will discipline chatterboxes in particular, allowing you to work through the agenda step by step and, most importantly, quickly. By setting the duration of the meeting in advance and consistently sticking to it, you also help meeting attendees avoid being late for subsequent appointments.

Have an agenda!

Make sure to include only a few important items on the agenda and only discuss topics that really concern all participants. Each item on the agenda should be presented in such a way that the purpose of the meeting is clear. Often, at the end of an agenda, you will find the item Miscellaneous. Delete it! Otherwise, the only result will be aimless and unstructured discussions that have nothing to do with the main meeting topic.

Set rules!

By defining basic rules for meetings, you avoid endless discussions. Find out what factors often negatively impact your team's meetings. Perhaps a smartphone ban might be helpful, or set a rule that everyone is allowed to talk and only when everyone has finished their points, are reactions to what has been said allowed. Avoid perfectionism and stop the discussion if a solution has already been found.

Appoint a moderator!

The moderator of a meeting is responsible for working through the agenda, documenting decisions, managing time, and following meeting rules. The role of facilitator does not automatically have to be held by the most senior employee. The role can also be rotated through the team. This way, everyone is a facilitator once and gets a completely new perspective on meetings.

Reduce recurring meetings!

Regularly review the need for recurring meetings. Are these meetings still effective and relevant to all participants? Can the meeting perhaps be held only every two weeks? You can test this by skipping the meeting for a short period on a trial basis or by reducing the frequency. If it turns out that the meeting is important after all, you can always reinstate it. Otherwise, you and all the other participants now have more time for more important tasks.

3. Bonus: Time wasters at home

Working from home, some of the time wasters of everyday office life are no longer present, such as the distractions caused by colleagues or loud ambient noise. Other time wasters, however, remain the same and there are some new ones.

There are also various time wasters lurking in your own home that you should identify and avoid. According to a [study by YouGov](#), the biggest challenges when working from home are distractions from family or household members (38%), as well as household chores and pets (38%). Another [study by Statista](#) found that the biggest distractions when working from home are social media (61.6%), smartphones (53.7%), binge-watching" (42.1%), children (33.8%), and gaming (30.4%). Here are some practical tips on how to deal with these time wasters so you can be more productive when working from home.

3.1 Family & other household members

At home, you may no longer be distracted by your colleagues, but you may be distracted by your own family members or roommates. We've all seen funny videos of kids, pets and other household members bursting into online meetings. While this is amusing, when it happens all the time, it can be a real productivity killer.



When working from home, it's important to communicate your set work hours to everyone. For example, you can use a Do-Not-Disturb sign to indicate that you don't want to be disturbed, or you can use a traffic light system.

- > **Red: Do not disturb under any circumstances.**
- > **Yellow: Only disturb in case of emergency.**
- > **Green: Feel free to come in.**

The traffic light system is easy to understand, especially for children. This way you can make sure that your work flow is not constantly disturbed.

3.2 Household chores and pets

When you work from home, it is very tempting to "quickly" do laundry, wash dishes, vacuum, take the dog for a mid-morning walk, etc. Balancing household chores and work has always been a challenge, but you should not have different rules at home office than at the office. Pre-plan your day or week. What needs to get done this week? When do I have time to do it? For example, if you need to do laundry, fill the machine in the morning before work and set a timer so that the laundry is ready in time for your lunch break and you can hang it up during your break. If you schedule breaks for such activities, you can work much more undisturbed and won't be pulled out of your workflow.



3.3 Social media, tv and gaming

The power of habit is very strong. How many of us turn on the TV as soon as we get home or sit down for a quick video game? When you work from home, separating the personal from the business is especially difficult, so it's often hard to resist such distractions. If you can't avoid the temptation, smart TVs and smartphones have settings that help you simply not access certain apps at certain times.

With most smart TVs, you can activate parental controls and also set the screen time. Thus, the TV turns off at certain times on certain days and can only be activated again with a passcode. For smartphones, you can also define times when only certain approved apps and phone calls are allowed. Deactivate all messaging, social media, gaming and streaming apps during working hours so you can work undisturbed.

4. How to identify time wasters with InLoox

Maybe you've already recognized some of your bad habits, maybe not. Time wasters are a very individual matter after all. That's why it's so important to actively identify your personal time wasters so that you can actually be aware of them. Only then will you be able to change your routine for the better. Don't panic, you don't have to spend hours brainstorming to uncover time wasters.

It's actually quite simple: If you already work with InLoox, use the integrated stopwatch in InLoox for Outlook. Otherwise, you can test InLoox for 30 days without any obligation and start working with the InLoox stopwatch as well. The advantage compared to a conventional stopwatch is that you can also assign the tracked time to a specific project or task. Here you can also find a short video tutorial on how to use the InLoox stopwatch.

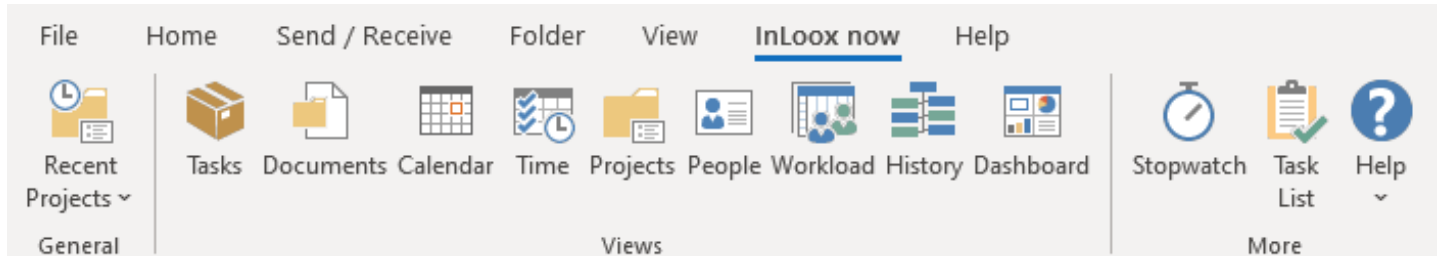
[Test InLoox](#)[Video Tutorial](#)

With the stopwatch, you record the times you need for your respective tasks on a regular workday and then save the time spent on each individual task in InLoox. At the end, you will get a comprehensive list of your tasks with the corresponding times you spent on them. To do this, simply open the global time tracking overview in InLoox, show the *Performed by* field in the list and group according to it. All your time tracking entries are now displayed at a glance. If you then filter via the *Start* and *End* fields, only the time tracking entries of a specific period will be displayed. Based on these, you can now see for which tasks you have spent the most time. Do these time-consuming activities include Facebook or looking at your smartphone? Congratulations, you have already identified your first time waster!

Go through your list step by step and check whether the time spent on a task is also in proportion to the priority of the task in question. If this is not the case, in order to become more efficient, you should change the way you work at this point. Maybe this method will also reveal reasons why your effort estimates for your projects are sometimes inaccurate. In fact, it's also great for revealing "submarine tasks". These are tasks that have not been officially agreed upon in a meeting, but are handed to you by bosses and colleagues spontaneously.

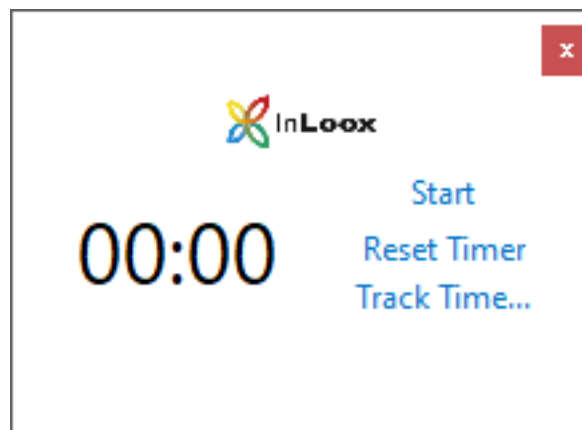
Here's how the InLoox stopwatch works

1. Open the *InLoox now!* or *InLoox PM* tab and click the *Stopwatch* button.



2. The stopwatch will open in a small window at the bottom right:

- > Click *Start* to stop the time for a task.
- > Click *Pause* to pause the time measurement.
- > If you want to reset the stopwatch to zero, select the *Reset Timer* button.
- > If the completed task belongs to a certain project, you can also record the time spent directly in that project. To do this, click the *Track Time* button.



About InLoox

InLoox was founded in 1999 and develops project management software integrated in Microsoft Outlook that simplifies and accelerates business processes. The convenient Outlook integration makes InLoox the central platform for project and day-to-day business. The product portfolio currently consists of the two product lines InLoox PM for the installation in your own network and the cloud solution InLoox now!. Our core business is selling software licenses and services, which include consulting, training, implementation and support for our software solutions. InLoox, Inc. is based in San Francisco, USA. The company operates worldwide and is represented, on a regional level, by the InLoox Partner Network. InLoox enables customers in a multitude of industries based in over 60 countries worldwide. InLoox customers include AVIS, CHRIST Wash Systems, German Red Cross, LIEBHERR, Novartis, Pentax Europe, STOR-Opack, SEAT, Siemens, US Airways, Verizon and many more.

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