Virtual Addiction?
Technology Can Be Helpful, But It Is Not Benign
By Jason Hosch, Ph.D.

When was the last time you surfed the Internet, checked your email, or sent a text message from your cell phone? Maybe at this very moment you are reading this article from your "Crackberry" (a.k.a. Blackberry), or from your laptop while tapped into the hotspot at the local Starbucks as you sip on your "Quad-Shot-Venti-Caramel-Mocha-Latte". Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, I think you would agree we me that we are now in the Information Age. Just think for a moment how integrated technology has become in our lives. If you are like the "average Joe" in America, chances are that you feel "dependent" to some degree upon the use of the computer, the Internet, email, wireless and satellite technology, GPS navigation … need I say more?

Certainly technology has enhanced our lifestyle, as the advent of any new invention is intended to do. Look at the Industrial Revolution, and how it brought about automated mass production enabling us to be more efficient and productive with our time and energy. Likewise, the Technological Revolution (or the Information Age), has brought its benefits for us as well – efficiency, precision, and a seemingly infinite array of options and information just a "click" away. But at the same time, we have become accustomed to a sedentary life of convenience and immediate gratification.

So how much is too much? Technology, and particularly computers and the Internet, at best are easily overused and abused. At worst, they are addictive. The combination of content, ease of access, low cost, visual stimulation, autonomy, and

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anonymity – all contribute to a highly mood-altering experience which can affect many aspects of our lives. These areas include our marriages, relationships, employment, grades and school achievement, health, and legal and financial issues, to name just a few. Technology affects the way we live and the way we love. As we become enticed and enamored by the use of technology, we may find ourselves drawn to becoming depersonalized, disconnected, and buffered from the reality of human relationships. We may even find ourselves using technology as an impersonal and insidious escape – be that through our use of I-Phones, PSPs, mindless Internet "surfing", compulsive shopping, gambling, or indulgence in online chat rooms, pornography, or cybersex. If we are not careful, the allures of technology can lead us down a dark path toward isolation, depression, and self-destruction.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not suggesting that we go live in caves (there aren't many of those here in Florida anyway). Technology, computers, and the Internet have many benefits to our society. Nevertheless, we can become all-consumed in our relationship with technology, where it gets in the way of our more important relationships – with people. It should be remembered that technology affects the way we live and the way we love. Unless technology improves the quality of our lives, it is of no benefit to us. Just because we create and provide wonderful new technologies does not mean that they are benign.

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