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Subject: Proposal for Determining the Feasibility of a Three-Step Plan to Reduce Screen Time

**Introduction**

Computers, laptops, smartphones, televisions, tablets. In modern society, all these types of technology have become an inherent part of everyday life. It is estimated that over 89% of people in the world own a smartphone and over 80% of people in developed countries have access to a personal computer in their private household.

Back when computers were first developed in the mid-1800s, it was impossible to predict that they would become so prevalent in everyday life. At first, computers were large, bulky, and had limited functionality such as simply storing data or performing Boolean (i.e. true/false, yes/no) logical operations. Fast-forward to today, computers are now capable of vast complex functions such as operating on the world wide web and running high-definition video games. Along with advances in technology, computers branched off to become smaller versions such as laptops and tablets. The world eventually became enamored with the seemingly infinite number of functions these technological devices could perform.

Unfortunately, such astounding growth and fascinating features would cause a drastic change on people’s lifestyle. Rather than talking with family and friends, people chose to stay on their smartphones to browse through social media; Rather than playing with their friends outdoors on playgrounds or at parks, children chose to stay at home to play video games on their TVs or the computer; Rather than reading a book from the library or the daily newspaper, people chose to go on their computers to browse the world wide web. All these changes in lifestyle point to one common theme: staring at a screen. This one simple notion of being addicted to a screen, either it be a computer screen or a smartphone screen, has created a myriad of problems such as reduced physical activity levels, decreasing social interactions and social skills, increased bodily issues, and much more. It is shocking to consider how such a small act can cause so many issues.

The intended audience for my report will be students, both in high school and University. From my perspective, students in this age range are the ones who use technological devices the most. They may use a computer to do schoolwork and play video games or use a smartphone to browse social media. It is my hope to raise awareness and propose a solution for this issue such that screen time for pleasure use can be reduced to an appropriate level.

**Statement of Problem**

Many people are unaware that staring at screens for a prolonged period will cause changes in day-to-day habits that will consequently lead to negative effects on both body and behavior. People have become so fixated with this technology that they are oblivious to the harm it is causing. Firstly, with increased screen time, there is a reduced time spent on physical activity. Instead of engaging in physical activity, people are choosing to play video games or watch TV, increasing their sedentary behavior. Lowered physical activity levels and increased sedentary activity have been linked to many health issues such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol. In addition, increased screen time causes poor body posture as people are craning their necks to look down at smartphones and hunching their shoulders from sitting in front of computers. Such poor body posture leads to chronic pain in the neck, shoulder, and back. Furthermore, increased screen time leads to fewer social interactions as people are choosing to stay at home to either play video games or browse the web. This is especially detrimental for children who are still working on acquiring social skills and desperately need opportunities for face-to-face interactions. Lowered social skills in early childhood can cause developmental issues that will lead to dire consequences in adulthood.

**Proposed Solution**

One possible solution to this prevalent issue is to adopt a three-step-plan that will go a long way to having a positive lifestyle change and reducing screen time. The reason I only chose three goals to accomplish is because any more could be quite deterring and difficult to achieve. My plan is adopted from gyms that have a 30-day-workout challenge. The first step of this plan is to take a 5-minute walk for every hour of computer use. Research has shown that breaking up sitting time can have many positive effects on improving health. Once this goal is accomplished on a consistent basis, the next step is to not use a smartphone during meals. It is quite common these days at restaurants to see people on their phones, rather than interacting with the people at their table. By having this goal in mind, it encourages people to interact with others directly and increase their social skills. Lastly, the most difficult step of this plan is to limit screen time to 2 hours per day for non-work or school related activities. Any free time available in a day is a great opportunity to engage in physical activity or spend time with friends and family. Unfortunately, many people instead choose to use their free time to browse social media on their smartphones or play video games.

In conjunction with the proposed plan above, it is also vital to highlight the harmful effects of prolonged screentime to raise awareness. For people to engage in a lifestyle change, they must become aware of the negative effects stemming from this issue.

**Scope**

To assess the feasibility of the three-step plan outlined above to reduce screen time, I plan to pursue six areas of inquiry:

1. How many hours per day (on average) are spent staring at a screen (computer, laptop, smartphone etc)?
2. What are the reasons for spending X amount of time in front of a screen?
3. Are consumers aware of the harmful effects of screen-time?
4. Would people be open to adopting the three-step plan that could change their lifestyle and reduce screen time?
5. What are some barriers that may prevent people from adopting these changes?
6. How could adherence to the three-step plan be assured?

**Methods**

My primary sources of data will include a survey that canvasses students of UBC and nearby high schools, gathering information on how long they currently spend staring at screens and if they are aware of the harmful effects of prolong screen time. This survey will also include questions regarding the likelihood of adopting the three-step plan and barriers that may prevent them from doing so.

Secondary sources will include publications that highlight the harmful effects of increased screen time and routines that aim to reduce this.

**My Qualifications**

I am currently a Computer Science student (BCS) at the University of British Columbia, and I have been working as a Research Coordinator for the past four years. As a current student majoring in computer science, I am constantly using a computer, so I know how easy it is to become fixated on screens and I also personally experience some of the negative effects outlined above (i.e. poor body posture). Due to this, I am actively trying to find ways to reduce my screen time and improve my joint pain. Additionally, my work in the research field provided me with direct experience in creating ethically approved surveys, collecting data, and analyzing it. I can draw from all these experiences to collect data and assess the feasibility of the three-step plan to reduce screen time.

**Conclusion**

Increased screen time in everyday life has caused lifestyle changes to which many are oblivious. These changes can have detrimental effects such as increase in health issues, chronic joint pain, and reduced social skills. It is imperative that consumers are made aware of these issues so changes can be made to improve their day-to-day habits. By addressing the six areas of inquiry mentioned above, I can assess the feasibility of implementing a three-step plan to reduce screen time. With your approval, I will begin the research at once.