



# New Facebook mood experiment asks, "Are you happier without Facebook?"

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**Leiden, The Netherlands - In response to Facebook's controversial mood experiment involving some 700,000 unwitting users, a new initiative has launched an experiment of its own -- determining how life without Facebook impacts user happiness.**

The non-profit initiative, known as "99 Days of Freedom," asks users to refrain from Facebook use for a period of 99 consecutive days and report-back on how the hiatus affects personal notions of happiness. The initiative's website, [99daysoffreedom.com](http://99daysoffreedom.com), provides a set of simple user instructions, which include posting a "time-off" image as a profile picture and starting a personalized, 99-day countdown clock. From there, participants are asked to complete anonymous "happiness surveys" at the 33, 66 and 99-day marks, with results posted to the initiative's website as they're compiled. The initiative will also host a message board through which participants can post anonymous accounts of how an extended break from Facebook is impacting their lives.

The initiative is the brainchild of Just, a creative agency based in Leiden, The Netherlands. Just's Art Director, Merijn Straathof, explains how what began as an office joke quickly morphed into an officially-funded project. "Like a lot of Facebook users, many of us were bothered by reports of secret mood experiments," says Straathof. "As we discussed it internally, we noted an interesting tendency: To a person, everyone had at least a 'complicated' relationship with Facebook. Whether it was being tagged in unflattering photos, getting into arguments with other users or simply regretting time lost through excessive use, there was a surprising degree of negative sentiment. Then someone joked, 'I guess that the real question is, 'How do you feel when you don't use Facebook?' There was group laughter, followed by, 'Wait a second. That's a really good question!'".

A cursory look at Facebook usage stats certainly supports the question's legitimacy. According to Facebook, it's 1.2 billion users spend an average of 17 minutes per day on the site, reading updates, following links or browsing photos. Over a three-month period, that adds up to more than 28-hours which, the initiative's creators contend, could be devoted to more emotionally fulfilling activities -- learning a new skill, performing volunteer work or spending time (offline) with friends and family.

The obvious question: Considering the remarkable levels of Facebook use, isn't 99 days a pretty big ask? This, explains Straathof, is by design. "We had a lot of arguments about the experiment's duration. If it's too extended, participants will lose interest. If it's too short, there's no meaningful behavioral change to assess. In the end, we landed on a 99-day program with periodic surveys and posts, hoping that such interaction will serve as a support group of sorts. As everyone at our firm is participating in the experiment, we'll be testing that one first-hand."

Although Straathof and his colleagues are eager to see the experiment's results, he stresses that the initiative is neither an anti-Facebook protest nor an attempt to harm the web's most popular site. "Facebook is an incredible platform, we're all fiercely loyal users and we believe that there's a lot to love about the service," says Straathof. "But we also feel that there are obvious emotional benefits to moderation. Our prediction is that the experiment will yield a lot of positive personal experiences and, 99 days from now, we'll know whether that theory has legs."

## **Artwork for publication**

Artwork is available for download at: <http://www.hostedbyjust.com/99daysoffreedom/press.zip>

## **About 99 Days of Freedom**

99 Days of Freedom is a nonprofit initiative launched by Just B.V. ([www.wearejust.com](http://www.wearejust.com)), a creative communications agency from the Netherlands. The company specializes in identities, brand strategy and online campaigns with a strong online focus. For questions about 99 Days of Freedom or Just, please contact [merijn.straathof@wearejust.com](mailto:merijn.straathof@wearejust.com).