

Why Death in a #Zombie Apocalypse Beats Life on the #Social Networks

✘ *By Steve Lundin, Cultural Analyst and Author, "The Manipulator: A Private Life in Public Relations (Volume I)"*

We've all seen horror so vivid that we awaken in a sticky sweat, wondering if we're still in the nightmare or in the safe confines of our beds. We look over at the clock, see that it's only 3:30 AM, resist the impulse to reach for our devices, then fall back into our pillows, realizing that we have three or four hours of sleep left before the real nightmare begins: our online lives. As we wrap the cat, partner or dog around us and drift back into a restless sleep, our minds might tiptoe to the simple life of [The Walking Dead](#), [Zombieland](#), [Citizen Z](#) or [World War Z](#). Based around the singular mission of staying alive, any of these dystopian fantasies provides a welcome relief from our hyper-connected, over complicated existences. To many, willing to admit it or not, the worst day of zombie evading beats the best day of multi-tasking.

You're never alone online, and it's that connection that is both comforting and terrifying. You can't turn yourself off because you'll:

- Lose touch with clients, employers or employees who will automatically assume that you don't care about their business, have quit, or fired them if they can't reach you every hour of the day.
- Lose friends and family members, who will instantly brand you as uncaring, unresponsive or dead if you don't answer communications within ten minutes.
- Run the risk of lapsing into social irrelevance if you

don't maintain a steady stream of life updates, recycled cut and paste observations, or people of Wal-Mart photos.

- Occasionally hear "I thought you were dead," because you were too busy having a real vacation to tweet about it.
- Interrupt the personal supply chain content mill that fuels your own branding campaign.

Imagine a world where you were afforded the luxury of working on one task until it was completed, not answering messages and getting away with it, and selecting your friends based on more than a single shared interest. The 70's are long gone, so that just leaves one scenario to hope for: The Zombie Apocalypse. There's a reason why multiple generations, from boomers to millennials, are so drawn to the zombie scenario: connectivity can have a hollow heart, but imminent death can really separate authentic friends from convenient acquaintances. No more hovering between like or unlike; in the Zombie Apocalypse decisions have a real gravitas.



(Taken at c2e2 in Chicago. Photo by Steve Lundin)

Does having one's flesh pulled from one's face by an animated corpse sound preferable to wading through a full in box? Of course not; but the simple, one mission scenario would be a lot less interesting without the zombies. As a matter of fact, it would be Walden. Faced with the choice of reading Thoreau or Kirkman, most modern readers will reach for *The Walking Dead*. But alas, the serenity of a turned off grid is mostly the stuff of escapist fiction, except in one place. The next best thing to a real Zombie Apocalypse is [#cosplay](#), an alternative role playing phenomenon that has exploded over the past decade, and provides a brief psychological relief from our world and, presumably, the connectivity that goes with it.

"The appeal of the simpler life is easy to understand, given what it takes to maintain a personal cyber presence and plod through an online existence these days. Stay alive, find food, shelter, hunt zombies. Eat or be eaten. These are primal things. They bring us back to where we started. They represent a basic desire to return to a unifying environment with a common enemy. Status updates? Not so much," observes Patrick O'Connor, who speaks at comicons on the rampant interest in zombies and contributed to the book, *The Psychology of the Walking Dead* (2015).

Summertime is one long *Great Gatsby*-esque moonlight party for zombie cosplayers, with conventions stretching from coast to coast, conducted on virtually every weekend. Maintaining character means that cosplayers who are channeling method acting wouldn't be caught undead texting. The interaction would break the spell, disrupt the moment, ruin the self-healing therapy that cosplay represents. "Cosplay convention goers are constantly telling me how liberating it feels to just be that one thing. A survivor or a zombie," adds O'Connor.

"Our zombie fan base has definitely grown over the past few years, and the popularity of our series of "The Walking Dead #1" variant covers are a great example," says Jerry Milani, PR

director for Wizard World, whose comic related events have grown so popular that they've even spawned sub branded events, like Bruce Campbell's Groovy Fest. Campbell was one of the original undead fighters in the cult classic Evil Dead movies. For those not content to just amble around a show, the UK's ZED events offers live, totally immersive experiences. Google "zombie events" and you'll find Chicago Zombies, Zombie Apocalypse Live, Escape Rooms, Zombie Survival Camp and Zombie Boot Camp; for the international set there's even a Purim Zombie walk in Tel Aviv.

The popularity of the Zombie Apocalypse has been studied extensively, undoubtedly yielding many term papers and Halloween oriented newspaper articles. Theories range from the shared belief that society is on the brink of collapse, that the scenario provides a common enemy, or that it has a visceral appeal to the little bit of redneck in all of us. In the Zombie scenario problems are easy to understand and identify, they're walking around looking for a meal. Zombie's don't text, they don't use phones or care about who is running for office, just who is running away from them. They have a singular focus, just like zombie hunters, who spend their time trying to find food or avoid becoming food.

Is there a connection between all this and an unconnected lifestyle? Take a look at Google Trends: the term "off the grid" has been rising steadily since 2005; where there's smoke there's probably a campfire. Call it the world of "Walking Walden," simple, unencumbered and unconnected. And as for personal branding campaigns in the Zombie Apocalypse, simply being the "guy with the sawed off shotgun," is about as complicated as it gets. And you don't need to do any SEO work to make content like that viral and sticky.

