Coping with Information Overload

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What happened to us?

“We have become far more proficient in generating information than we are in managing it, and we have also built technology that easily allows us to create new information without human intervention.”

~Jonathan B. Spira

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Coping with Information Overload

“In an online world of small pieces loosely joined, librarians are among the most well qualified and highly motivated joiners of those pieces.”

~ John Udell – “Remixing the Library”

where does information overload come from?

the desire to know and to be a part of things.

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**effects of info overload**

28% (2.1 hours) of a knowledge worker's day is consumed by interruptions.

--2005 Basex survey

IQ scores when interrupted by emails/phone calls = 10 points lower (smoking marijuana = 4 points lower).

--2005 University of London study

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**Attention Deficit Trait**: a sustained negative neurological effect of information overload.

“The brain and body get locked into a reverberating circuit while the brain's frontal lobes lose their sophistication...People with ADT have difficulty staying organised, setting priorities, and managing time, and they feel a constant low level of panic and guilt.”

--“Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform.” E.M. Hallowell.

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**control the influx**

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inventory your inputs

Inventory all of your devices (work and home), and what you view on each.

weed, weed, weed... mercilessly!
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work toward your goals through daily and weekly tasks

"To think too long about doing a thing often becomes its undoing."
-- Eva Young

file things immediately
- automate if possible

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organize like with like

• choose a method for tracking ideas & files (del.icio.us, Word, Evernote)
• might be multiple methods
• think about what you’re saving
• name the file topically & specifically
• add dates (YYMMDD) for periodic stuff

take a class on file management

file new things away
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keep a master waiting list of what's owed to you

stay neat (virtually & physically)

try new things and see if tech works for you, even if you fall away in the end
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**time management skills**

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Keep a detailed time diary (10 min increments) for 1 week.

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Write down what you do and why (no lying).

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Review the results for efficiencies, distractability, time of day patterns, etc.
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use your calendar to its fullest capabilities

schedule yourself to organize and do unscheduled work

take breaks.
no, for real.
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- **use downtime**
- **stress management skills**
- **schedule unplugged time**

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unplug at will

eliminate stressful interruptions

you choose when you interact with technology or information

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- cut down your to-do list to what really matters

- learn how to say NO

- at home, set up a quick consistent way to note to yourself urgent work issues

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balance your life to your own standards

think of information as a stream, not a lake.

tips for dealing with specific types of information

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### print information

- Decide: do you prefer print to digital?
- If it’s unread 3 issues in a row, unsubscribe
- Get rid of “the pile”
- Unsubscribe from catalogs: CatalogChoice.org

### online newsletters

- How is it being pushed to you? Best way?
- If it’s unread 3 issues in a row, unsubscribe
- If via email, create filters to put all new issues into one folder
- Get rid of “the digital pile”

### online learning

- Schedule yourself for live sessions
- No multi-tasking during sessions
- Keep a wish list of archived sessions
- Build these into your yearly training goals

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email overload
- Start scheduling email scan time
- Use email only when appropriate
- Deal with email by subject
- Use folders and filters

& more email overload tips
- Flag and file items for follow-up
- INBOX ZERO
- Follow good email etiquette
- Delete and archive

email listservs
- Filter into folders
- Weed your listservs heavily
- If you ignore a listserv for 2 weeks, unsubscribe

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blogs
If 5+ blogs, use RSS (Google Reader)
Review daily, or at least weekly (if few)
Flag and file items for follow-up
Periodically weed feeds

RSS
Use RSS when appropriate
Organize feeds into folders
If an avid RSS user, use it to send you reminders during the day

interruptive tech overload
Phones, text messaging, IM
Check when you want to
Use your status message well
Turn it OFF

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social networks

- Pick a primary network
- Sort contacts into groups
- Schedule time to interact, read updates
- Choose one alert type (email, SMS, pop-up)

Twitter

- Think of it as a stream, not a lake
- Use a Twitter client: Tweetdeck or Hootsuite
- Flag items for follow-up (Evernote, email)
- Regularly weed the people you follow

netcasts

- Replace radio with podcasts
- Use a client like Google Listen or iTunes
- Regularly weed your subscriptions
- If nothing useful for 3 shows, unsubscribe
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**serendipitous surfing**

Have a method for tracking useful finds (Evernote, wiki, blog, bookmarks)

Weed mercilessly

Surfing = time suck


“[I]f you want to use current information technologies fully to address the problems and opportunities that your library faces, then you must quit complaining and lock and load.”

pick what works for you.

only do what you realistically will follow up on.
above all else, breathe.

Further Resources

"Being Wired or Being Tired: 10 Ways to Cope with Information Overload" by Sarah Houghton-Jan (from Ariadne)

"How to Stop Your Inbox Exploding" by Cory Doctorow

Information Overload: We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Us by Jonathan B. Spira

Questions?

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