Title:
Information Overload - 6 Primary Causes

Word Count:
806

Summary:
All knowledge workers of today can attest to the overwhelming amount of
information they need to deal with on a daily basis. This constant state of
information overload is caused by several conspiring factors:

#1 – More Information Than We Can Process

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result. To this you can add hundreds of ebooks on the topic and most likely a
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#1 – More Information Than We Can Process

Search the web for almost any topic and you will get millions of web pages as a
result. To this you can add hundreds of ebooks on the topic and most likely a
dozen traditionally published books available on Amazon.com. There is no way you
can possibly process all this information in your lifetime. And this is just for
one topic you're working on this week.

How do you know which of all this information is remotely important, or even
factually correct? Google tries to rank their search results by relevance
according to their own secret algorithms. Traditional book publishers filter out
most book proposals and only publish a very small fraction of the books they are
offered. Presumably only the "best" books get published with this process. But
according to what criteria?

Just to discover who is an authority on the topic that your are trying to

research, adds another dimension to your research. Which in turn results in more information that you need to process.

#2 - Bombardment of Unsolicited Information

How many unsolicited emails do you receive each day? And that's after your SPAM filter has done its best to spare you from the majority of the onslaught. But do you really trust your SPAM filter? Don't you occasionally check the SPAM folder to see if something important didn't slip through?

How many email lists or ezines have you subscribed to that were once relevant to your work, but are now just sending your irrelevant commercial offers? But since they once contained valuable information you stay on the subscription list because there may be something useful yet to come.

When you search or browse the web you are constantly bombarded with ads that are tailored to appear to be relevant to what you are looking for. Since there might be something useful in these offers, you click on the ads. Leading to even more unsolicited information that you need to evaluate and process.

All this adds up to increasing amounts of unsolicited information that you need to deal with, just to get to the information that you have requested and really need.

#3 - Speed of New Information Accelerates

Back when the majority of your information was delivered by the postman and the newspaper boy once a day, keeping up with the information flow was not a big problem. Today, the analogy of drinking from a fire hose pales in comparison to the flood of information rushing at you from all directions.

Not only has the speed of delivery increased over time, but it continues to accelerate, creating an exponential effect.

#4 - Value of Information Plummets

The information age was based on the principle that information was scarce and valuable. In the Attention Age with a glut of information available, the perceived value quickly approaches zero. This applies indiscriminately to all information since we have no effective mechanisms to evaluate what is truly important, what is simply redundant and what is plain junk.

All marketers of information products should be gravely concerned about this

trend. How can you sell products at a profit in the future when the perceived value of all information is $0?

Furthermore, it will probably not take long before people realize that some information is worth less than $0. Given that our attention is the most scarce and valuable resource in the Attention Age, processing and evaluating information comes at a severe cost. This cost should be deducted from the previously perceived value of the information, to arrive at its true value.

#5 – Amount of Contradiction Increase

With a thousand voices screaming at you, who do you trust? The one with the loudest voice? The one with the largest group of supporters? How do you evaluate contradictory information in a subject that you are just beginning to research?

In previous ages the number of information sources was significantly smaller, even orders of magnitudes smaller. Back then, these information sources assumed the role of an authority since they practically had a monopoly on information distribution. Think about your old hometown newspaper. What they printed was universally accepted as "the truth".

#6 – Our Information Needs Increase

"The one with the most money wins" has been replaced by "the one with the most information wins". If you know something about the market that your competitor doesn't, then you have an advantage. This information arms race leads to an ever increasing appetite for more information. Which of course feeds into the previous bullets in a vicious circle.

These bullets were inspired by Rich Schefren's recent report: The Attention Age Doctrine. A following article will deal with strategies for surviving information overload.