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Business: Too Much Input, Not Enough "Innerput"

Information overload means too little time to think.

Published on December 1, 2011 by Jim Taylor, Ph.D. in The Power of Prime

The Internet, and all of the new technology that it has spawned, has made information available at the fingertips of businesspeople instantaneously. The sheer volume of information now accessible on line is staggering. Information continues to become more available to more people in less time; from web sites to email to RSS feeds to [Twitter](#), we have input at an unprecedented rate and volume. Ironically, as the frequency of information grows, the length of messages shrinks (e.g., Twitter's 140-character limit. This isn't necessarily a bad thing; think of haiku). And, amazingly, the vast majority of this information is free.



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All of this information has been a boon to the business world. This ready access to important information has made businesspeople more efficient than ever. "Cloud sourcing" has created never-before-possible opportunities for [collaboration](#) that have resulted in an explosion of [creativity](#) and innovation at all levels of the corporate world. This new technology has enabled the business world to increase [productivity](#) to levels never seen before.

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At the same time, for all its benefits, any businessperson will tell you that there are costs to this 24/7 connectivity and accessibility. I have already addressed the issue of [multi-tasking](#) and [work/life balance](#) in previous writings. Today, I want to explore another unfortunate consequence of this torrent of information, namely, that our "mental inbox" becomes overloaded.

With your mind spilling over with information, your primary [motivation](#) is to empty it as quickly as possible. You probably use two "information survival" strategies when your inbox fills up. You output as quickly as possible without sufficient thought to either the incoming or [outgoing](#) information. The obvious downside to this approach is that your input lacks thorough consideration and evaluation and your output lacks quality. Or, you are so overwhelmed by information that you simply delete large swathes of information without even looking at it. The obvious downside here is that important information may be missed.

Information overload isn't the only problem with this deluge of data that comes to those of you who are connected to the office 24/7. Such large and never-ending quantities of input interfere with your ability to "innerput," a word I created to denote your thought processes in response to input, including analysis, synthesis, judgments, and decisions. With so much information coming in and the need to get information out, innerput suffers; there is neither the time nor the energy to adequately process all of the information.

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Information is only a tool; its value lies in how you use it. And information has limited value, either as input or output, without innerput. Only through innerput does information become meaningful, only then can it morph from simple data to knowledge, insights, and ideas. And that only comes when there is time for innerput; stopping in the middle of this flood of information to think about, wrestle with, challenge, and build on the information that arrives at your technological doorstep.

The dangers of input and output without innerput can be seen daily in the business world. Unfounded rumors that aren't investigated or analyzed adequately before they are posted spread across the Internet and are accepted and remain as "truth" even when they are definitively debunked later. Information without context limits its value by restricting your understanding and its meaning to your professional life. One-sided stories without the balance of another perspective create the illusion of accuracy and correctness. And all of this input doesn't just describe phenomena that are happening in the world. It also impacts those very events because the business world, for example, analysts and investors, make judgments about and decide on how we will respond based on these limited data.

For individual businesspeople, input without innerput has serious consequences. It means staying on the surface of information rather than diving deep into its meaning and implications. The absence of innerput prevents you from taking real ownership of the information and integrating it into your knowledge base. It also keeps you from transforming the input from cold and lifeless data into a power plant of insight, creativity, innovation, and action that will be beneficial to your current job responsibilities, your long-term career, and the company for whom you work.

So how can you swim against the tide of information overload and find the time for innerput? The answer to this question is really quite simple, but nonetheless far from easy. The power to control the amount of input you allow in, foster innerput, and ensure the quality of the output you produce is in your individual hands. Too often, I see businesspeople becoming slaves to technology rather than being its master, information junkies who just crave the input regardless of its value, victims of technology who act as if they are powerless to control it.

You can control the flow of information in several ways. First, ask yourself what purpose all of this input serves and whether the typical information you receive each day really brings something of value to the table. You'll likely realize that you're inputting a great deal of information simply out of habit or perhaps a concern that you will miss out on something really important if you limit your input. Ask yourself: Do you really need to follow all of those people on Twitter or Facebook or check your smartphone every two minutes? Hopefully, answering these questions will put your input into perspective and show you that much of your input is unnecessary.

Next, choose the input you deem most important and jettison that which doesn't clear that self-determined threshold of importance to your work. When you commit to input filtering and limits, you will establish new and healthier input habits. And your work life will become so much more manageable.

With your input load reduced and your new understanding of the importance of innerput (you already knew it intuitively; I just needed to bring it into your consciousness), you now have the time to devote innerput to the input that you really value. The result? Less feeling of drowning in

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