

How to Deal with Information Overload

By Walter Jessen, PhD, and Simon Frantz

Suffering from information overload is a frustrating and all-too-common condition today. If it isn't hard enough to clear your overflowing email inbox, there's the stress of staying on top of the blossoming number of journals and medical blogs in your field, papers uncovered through regular PubMed or Medline searches, not to mention the pressure of keeping up-to-date with the latest must-use social media tools. And yet, a small number of people seem to stay afloat while the vast majority of us are drowning in information. What's their secret?

Every year, the Science Online conference in North Carolina brings together some of the most savvy digital natives in science and journalism. This provided a perfect opportunity for us to pose the question in the session *Drowning in Information! How Can We Create Organization & Balance—Tools and Strategies for Managing Information Overload (Science and Otherwise)* (<http://scio12.wikispaces.com/D3S2d.+Drowning+in+Information>). Below are some of the main themes and tips that emerged for managing the data deluge that hits you on a daily basis.

Find signals among the noise

You don't need to subscribe to everything! Find the information gathering tools that suit your content needs. If you regularly read journals and magazines, subscribe to their RSS feeds so that you can read them all in one place. Google Reader (www.google.com/reader) is a free, Web-based aggregator that allows you to organize, read, and search all of your favorite news sites and blogs in one place. If you like staying on top of the latest trends in a particular discipline, join Twitter (<https://twitter.com>) and follow people in your field and/or people that share your interests and have your news curated. If you have an iPhone or iPad, the Flipboard app (<http://flipboard.com>) collates content from several social media sources.

Filter, filter, filter

For many people, reading and responding to email consumes the most time during a normal business day. Take back some of the time used to manage email by using folders to stay organized. In your email client, create specific folders based on topic, task, or person. Whether it's for must-read content or

for messages you can turn to at a later date, automate the task of sorting email based on keyword(s) and/or sender. This allows you to immediately focus on the message rather than on the action of sorting. Color-code emails to distinguish family and friends from meeting requests or table of content alerts, and do the same for RSS feeds, Twitter, and other online sources. Divide information flows into folders or lists, such as "Daily reads" or "Weekend reads" or other categories that reflect your desired reading habits and content organization. For more advanced management between different services and devices, use ifttt (If This Then That; <http://ifttt.com>), which enables the creation of customized, automated tasks.

Organize and archive

There are numerous free online tools that can help you store your information, but three repeatedly came up in the discussion: Dropbox (<https://www.dropbox.com>), which allows you to share files between your work and home computer; Mendeley (<http://www.mendeley.com>), a reference manager that allows you to organize, read, and annotate PDF documents; and Evernote (<http://www.evernote.com>), a note-taking app

which saves your most valuable notes, clippings, and photos on your computer and across all your mobile devices. Pinboard (<http://pinboard.in>) was also mentioned; although it is a paid service it allows you to bookmark and organize links, effortlessly saving those shared via Twitter.

Get into the habit

It's easy to give up on a tool within days, especially if it becomes stressful to deal with its backlog after a deadline, conference or, heaven forbid, a vacation. People recommended throwing yourself into a method for 30 days and see if it works before ditching it. And try regular cleansing sessions—for instance, try clearing your information streams every Sunday evening. That way, you'll start each week without the pressure or guilt of looking at old content that you are unlikely to read anyway. ●

Walter Jessen is a computational biologist, knowledge curator, and Web developer at Walter Jessen Discovery New Media (<http://www.walterjessen.com>). Simon Frantz is the Science/Technology Features editor at BBC Future (<http://www.bbc.com/future>).

Doximity

By Sara Reistad-Long

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* has reported that one in nine Americans now have chronic kidney disease, and that figure is believed to be growing. At the same time many publications (among them, *Kidney News*) are tracking a drop in the number of nephrologists entering the field, and others have documented the strain on those already practicing as dialysis resources are stretched thin.

As awareness of kidney disease within the general population increases, so will nephrologists' need for a safe, efficient, and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)-compliant system for securely managing incoming referrals and discussing patient information with a treatment team. Although doctors themselves are often early adopters of information technology—81 percent now own a smartphone, for example—medicine as a whole has been slow to catch up. Email and Short Message Service (SMS), for instance, are not considered HIPAA secure, a point that the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations emphasized in November 2011 when it issued a ban on texting. This, of course, leaves physicians reliant on telephones, pagers, and faxes to communicate patient information.

Doximity was founded to address what we see as one of the next big challenges in health care—facilitating communication among physicians. Our company has been described as a kind of LinkedIn for doctors, and with nearly 30,000 physicians signed up, we're already the largest medical professional network in the country. Enabling doctors to find and make connections in their practices and with alumni is valuable in itself, but what may be even more essential to our

specific community is a private and HIPAA-secure method of exchanging information. We assign dual passwords to each user so each message is encrypted end to end. And because Doximity has been optimized for both smartphones and tablets, messages can be sent, and referrals made, from the operating room—or far from the nearest hospital—as easily as from a computer.

Equally integral to safe communication is real-name interaction. At Doximity, we verify each of our users. We believe that ensuring every member's identity creates a framework of trust, expertise, and professionalism that reflects the effective physician interaction in the real world. The difference, of course, is that these communications are increasingly happening as ongoing written discussions across thousands of miles.

In many ways, our newest feature, iRounds, grew out of these changes. Not unlike social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google, iRounds allows users to tap into larger communities to discuss patient cases, new research, emerging medical technologies, and more.

"Doximity offers an easy way to keep up to date on the latest news, best blog posts, and journal articles from our specialty," said Joshua Schwimmer, MD, a nephrologist at Lenox Hill Hospital and The Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. "For example, a review article on focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS) in the *New England Journal of Medicine* was the basis for a discussion among multiple specialties about the presentation of FSGS, the differences between FSGS and diabetic nephropathy, and the indications for renal biopsy. The easy-access via smartphone and the Web, the user-friendly design, and the ready availability of physicians' credentials makes it simple to collaborate and learn from your colleagues." ●

Sara Reistad-Long is affiliated with Doximity.

