

Communications Audit

WORKSHEET AND EXERCISE

Introduction

Take a minute to think about how much information you process every day. You may get news on the Internet, radio and television. You may read blogs. You might also read books and magazines and newspapers. You probably also watch a lot of TV, where you get entertainment and news. You might watch a lot of DVDs, and listen to the radio on the way to work. At work, you might get memos and emails and a billion other pieces of information coming at you. You might be a part of an online forum, or social site, or newsgroup, or mailing list (or several!). You may carry a cell phone – or two! And you may be within reach of someone at all times.

It's information overload. You may never be alone anymore!

Our brains are not made to process this much information. We can do it, but it gives us a lot of stress, and we cannot think about any of the information long enough for it to give us real value. We are in the middle of a vast river of information, and it just flows by us constantly. In the Seventeenth Century, a typical person took in within their entire lifetime as much information as we receive in one day's edition of the New York Times. Sometimes it just feels like it's too much!

Use this Inventory to tabulate your own use of media in the past three days. When you are finished, turn to the Exercise below.

Date:		
Media item	Where you used it	How many minutes in use (approximately)
Home phone		
Cell phone		
Computer on Internet		

Newspaper		
Radio		
CD of music		
DVD of movie		
Blackberry or other portable device		
Other media item (list below)		

EXERCISE

Introduction

So what do you do about it? Sometimes it's good to get drastic. Try a media fast. But is it even possible? Yes, it is. Here are some ideas:

- If you're feeling bold, cut out everything for a week. Well, everything that isn't completely essential — you might need things like email for work, but can you really say that reading your blogs is essential? Is TV essential? Most likely not. Cut it out and see if you can make it a week.
- Fast for a day. Can't hack a week? Try one day. Cutting all Internet, TV, radio, and reading for a day would be pretty drastic for most of us. See if you can last.
- Fast on specific media, and take turns. Instead of cutting out everything, try cutting out only TV for a week. Then try cutting out newspapers and magazines. Then ... if you dare ... try cutting out your blogs. Then your favorite websites
- When you fast, work on specific goals. Don't replace one media with another, or with another time-waster. Have a goal that you'd like to accomplish for that day, or week. See if you can use the time you'd normally spend on media to accomplish actions that further your goals.
- Once your fast is over, re-think your media intake. You may discover that cutting out TV, for example, wasn't as hard as you thought, and that you were able to get a lot done. Maybe you want to stay off TV for good, or at least cut back on it drastically. Instead of launching right back into your old media habits, use your media more thoughtfully from now on. See if you can live with less, and work on your personal goals more.
- Imagine the peace of mind that could come from shutting off the river of information that comes at you daily.
- Imagine the focus you could find without all the distractions.

Reflection:

What was this exercise like for you? Do you feel defensive about your own use of media? What did you do during your "fast" instead of using media? What do you feel you learned from this exercise?