



How to Handle the Information Avalanche

I had a great idea this morning, but I didn't like it.

—SAM GOLDWYN

Supposedly, we are in *the Paperless Age*. But, according to University Microfilms, we're now creating *one billion pages* of information each and every day here in the United States alone. Sometimes I think most of it crosses *my* desk!

People are struggling to cope with the avalanche of information. I get as big an avalanche as anybody. Here's what goes on, for me. First of all, I have all the trade and professional journals, new books, association newsletters, and other documents related to my three primary businesses—direct marketing, infomercial production, and speaking—to keep up with. I have all the general business press to be concerned with, from *Entrepreneur* and *Inc.*

to *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. As a consultant, I'm often "learning" several new businesses in connection with my clients, so I read their trade publications, too. Because of the infomercial business, I watch a lot of television, and I review about 20 hours of videotape every month. Because I do so much work with direct-mail, I read ALL of my "junk mail." And I read at least one book a week. Fortunately, I speed read. But, still . . .

How Do You Handle All This?

I'm sure you are digging out from under your own avalanche of information everyday, too. Let me offer you some "shovels."

IMPROVE YOUR READING SKILLS

Many people are poor readers and insist that they do not "like" to read. Sadly, our U.S. universities and high schools alike are churning out mass numbers of young people who do not read, get all their news from TV or radio, and, in a shocking number of cases, are borderline illiterate. Once again, honesty with yourself is the best policy. Hire a tutor if necessary. If not, then take or get a good home study speed reading course. Speed reading (and speed comprehension) is real.

By the way, I think you **MUST** read, as you can see in the accompanying article (Figure 9.1), that I originally wrote for one of my newsletters.

GET ONLY THE INFORMATION YOU REALLY WANT AND NEED

If you are really busy, and time is much more of an issue than money, you can pay others to read for you. There are "clipping services," including one run by *The Wall Street Journal*, that will

FIGURE 9.1

APPARENTLY, YOU ARE NOW AN AMAZING ODDITY AKIN TO A THREE-HEADED COW—IF YOU READ. The Saturday after Christmas, working in my office, I had the weekend *Today Show* on the TV, and jerked my head around to watch when I heard this amazing statement, delivered with breathless excitement:

“Coming up next—we’ll interview the woman who read a book a week for a year and has written her own book about the experience!”

What!?! With brief lapses here and there, I’ve read at least a book a week every year for more than 30 years. What’s the big deal about this? Well, apparently it is a big deal. The last time I went to Barnes & Noble, I bought a new biography of Ben Franklin, Tom Peters’ new book, a couple of other business books, a book about stroke-free living, three paperback novels to take on airplanes, and about 20 magazines. The clerk said: “Lifetime’s supply, huh?” Sheesh.

You **MUST** read a lot to succeed. Here are the reasons: (1) Varied, diverse input, ideas, viewpoints, life stories, examples, all the essential raw material poured into your subconscious mind, for it to sift, sort, try matching up with other puzzle pieces it already has, so it can occasionally yell “Eureka!” and hand you something profitable—without daily flow of new stuff, it just sleeps. Wealth secret: you cannot manufacture anything without raw material. Not even

FIGURE 9.1, continued

money. (2) Without exposure to others' thinking, your own range of thought shrinks. Soon, you're a mental midget. Your range of thought narrows, like your range of motion shrinks if you don't move and stretch. (3) You can't stay current. I read a monstrous amount and I still can't stay current. If you're not reading a book or two, a dozen magazines, a few newspapers, and a few newsletters every week, you must be way, way, way behind. Pretty soon, your conversation reveals you as a dinosaur. (4) If you have kids, you want to set a decent example for them. They need to see you reading. They need to hear you talking about what you read. When I was a kid, the years my family was dead broke, we made a regularly scheduled, weekly treks to the public library for an hour or so. My father, mother, and I each picked out three or four books for the week, took them home, read them, and talked about them. Now I prefer going to the bookstore, because I have money, and like keeping the books. However, I'm grateful for the library-habit years. It would be a better thing for most families to do than going to the movies, arcade, or Wal-Mart.

'Historical note I had in a book I wrote back in 1985: the town leaders of Franklin, Massachusetts, once wrote and asked Ben Franklin for a donation so they could buy a bell for the church steeple. He sent money with this note: "I'm honored you have named your town Franklin and a donation is enclosed. However, I suggest you start a library with it rather than buying a bell. I prefer sense to sound."

ferret through hundreds of daily newspapers, trade magazines, etc., for the topic you have requested and fax to you just the articles about your topic. You may have a staff person read and clip for you. A good project for son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter is a regular pile of reading, like trade journals, to clip, highlight, even summarize for you. One of my clients pays his high-school-age son \$75.00 a week to read 14 different trade journals and newsletters and record summaries and excerpts on a weekly tape that he can listen to while he drives to work.

SET ASIDE AND “BULK” MATERIAL THAT IS NOT TIME SENSITIVE, TO REVIEW AT YOUR LEISURE

Catalogs, interesting-looking junk mail, and popular magazines fall into this category. You **MUST** be very selective about what warrants your attention now, what later, what never.

CONSIDER CONDENSATION

You can subscribe to *Executive Book Summaries*, for example, and get brief summaries of a dozen new, “hot” business books every month. This is sort of a Cliff Notes for adults. There’s a similar service, *Newstrack*, for news buffs.

USE YOUR VCR, DVD, OR TIVO

Tape programs of interest or importance to you, then watch them at your convenience.

USE YOUR “DRIVE TIME” OR TRAVEL TIME AS LEARNING TIME

Here are the average to-and-from-the-office commute times for major cities: New York, 1 hour, 5 minutes; Washington DC, 1 hour;

Houston, 1 hour; L.A., 1 hour, 30 minutes; Dallas, 48 minutes; Phoenix, 46 minutes; Buffalo, 40 minutes. Because most audio-cassettes are about 40 minutes in length, you can finish a cassette a day. Half a cassette (one side) per drive. And these days, everything is available on audiocassette: people like me; experts in various fields. Tapes on business, finance, health, sex, self-improvement, foreign languages, travel, lectures from great college professors'; classic and contemporary fiction; you name it. If you average 40 minutes a day x 250 workdays, that's 167 "classroom hours" a year available to you.

RESIST THE SIREN SONG OF DISTRACTION

A lot of people let "noninformation" consume a lot of their time. Today's news is tomorrow's fish-wrap, yet we have just about become consumed with useless news. Twenty-four-hour-a-day news stations; *60 Minutes* beget *60 Minutes II*; *20/20*, *20/20 Downtown*; *Dateline* twice a week. News-talk radio. Etc. Yes, you want to be informed. But do you need to be informed about the latest celebrity sex or shoplifting scandal, the latest athlete going to jail, the weather in Bulgaria?

USE TECHNOLOGY, BUT RESIST SEDUCTION BY TECHNOLOGY

Technology is terrific when it *really* enhances productivity. But all too often it only gives the illusion of that. People who spend hours on end roaming the Internet or in e-mail dialogue don't fool me. This is just another escape into busyness, just like going to one darned meeting after another.

However, virtually every newspaper is now online, so if you are traveling to a distant city and would benefit from being familiar with that city's current news, it's readily available.

Most associations and trade journals have useful archives. My Gold, Gold+, and Gold/VIP Members have access to a members'-only section of my dankennedy.com site, with transcripts of past interviews with experts, articles, past newsletters, and other reference material.

Specialize. But Not too Much.

It is probably better to know a great deal about one, two, or several things than a tiny bit about everything. Specialization almost always adds value. And it can be used to limit information flow.

In business, I specialize in direct-response advertising and direct-mail, with a subspecialty in “long form” (copy intensive) advertising, and another subspecialty in the marketing of information products. As a result, I rarely bother reading *Advertising Age* magazine, a trade journal for traditional advertising professionals, but I do read *Direct Marketing* magazine and *DIRECT*. Being able NOT to read something is very useful.

However, too narrow of focus becomes myopia. If you exclude too much information and input, you rob your brain of the raw material needed for breakthrough ideas. Most people in a particular industry are so myopic they start committing what I call “marketing incest”—with the same result as real incest; after just a few generations, everybody’s stupid. People in “x” business look at what everybody else in “x” business is doing, they go to association meetings together, read the same trade journals, and copy from each other. Getting outside this box is important.

So, you need a balance. A lot of specialization, but not too much specialization.

Know What You Are Looking For

Dealing with today's overwhelming quantity of information is a bit like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. That task is made less daunting because you know you are looking for a needle. It would be even worse if you were just told to go through the entire hay mound and look for *something*.

So, here's a little test (Figure 9.2) I give to my clients that you might try taking at the end of each week. It will help you focus, help you spot the right things, and find the needles in the haystack of the week ahead.

FIGURE 9.2

What Do You Know This Week, That You Didn't Know Last Week, About . . .	
1. Your business?	_____

2. Your industry as a whole?	_____

3. Your competitors?	_____

4. Your customers or clients as a group?	_____

5. Your top 10, 20, or 30 customers or clients?	_____



FIGURE 9.2, continued

6. A client, individually? _____

7. One of the top leaders in your field? _____

8. Societal, cultural, or economic trends that may affect your business? _____

9. A “success” topic—personal finance, self-motivation, time management? _____

10. A “marketing” topic—direct-response advertising, construction of offers, copy that sells, direct mail, the Internet? _____

11. A person, event, or topic in the current news of great interest or importance to your clientele? _____

12. A “method”—a means, process, technique of doing something useful to you, whether manufacturing your widget faster or making a sales presentation more effectively? _____

If you actually discipline yourself to get one answer to each question worth putting down in writing just once a week, after a year, you'll be 624 big steps ahead of your peers and competitors. And the odds are excellent you'll have uncovered a few ultra-valuable gems. Keeping these questions in the forefront of your mind is a way of "electrifying and magnetizing your antenna," so casual conversations or even an overheard conversation can yield something useful you'd otherwise never have noticed.

How to Organize and Manage Ideas

The great success educator Earl Nightingale wrote that "a single thought can revolutionize your life. A single thought can make you rich or well-to-do, or it can land you in prison for the rest of your life. Everything was an idea before it became real in the world . . . the law of averages begins to swing in your direction when you begin to produce ideas."

"Ideas," Earl said, "are like slippery fish."

It is up to us to catch every idea—not to let
one slip by us.



For many years, I used a strategy adapted from Michael Vance, a close associate of Walt Disney, called the storyboard. I had a corked wall in my office, with vertical columns, each column headed by a business or project title. Then, every time I had an idea, I'd jot it down on a small card, about half of a 3 x 5-inch

card, and pushpin it up there in the correct column. I carried a little supply of cards with me at all times, so I never lost an idea. Frankly, for a while, I drifted away from that; now I've returned.

I also maintain different "project notebooks" or even legal pads dedicated to one project.

I have a pad and pen everywhere. Even in the bathroom.

Some people are very adept at verbalizing their ideas, so they carry micro-recorders, dictate, have a staff person or service transcribe it all, then organize it. My brain engages with pen in hand or fingers on keyboard.

The important thing is for you to choose and use *some* method for capturing every idea that comes to you, wherever, and whenever it happens.

Bulk is a problem for many of us. My friend Lee Milteer has research, reference, and project piles in gigantic clear plastic bags, so she can see what's in them. My piles have 4 x 6-inch title cards on them. I have more than 1,000 books on shelves, but if I read a book with only a few worthwhile pages, I tear out the pages, file them, then throw out the book. The computer with the CD-ROM is obviously a major tool in reducing bulk for information storage. From a time standpoint, the trick is to be able to quickly find what you need when you need it—my own Achilles heel.

How the Well-Trained, Conditioned, and Fit Subconscious Mind Helps Handle the Information Avalanche

From the mid-1950s to 1960, Dr. Maxwell Maltz worked devising and perfecting practical methods for making the subconscious mind fitter and more useful. His work is summarized in

his classic best-selling book *Psycho-Cybernetics* and in the recently updated companion I co-authored, *The New Psycho-Cybernetics*. Dr. Maltz's findings and methods have been of enormous importance to me my entire life, and I urge you to investigate them for yourself. Specific to being more productive, and to better managing and utilizing information, you can deliberately make your subconscious work better as a finder, organizer, and provider of whatever you need to make a presentation, write a sales letter, whatever. This is beyond ordinary memory. This is a *creative* retrieval process.

For example, I, like most direct-response ad copywriters, maintain a room full of what we call "swipe files." These are files of samples by category. One file contains "Headlines, Weight Loss Ads," another "Headlines, Income Opportunity Ads." There are files for opening sentences, guarantees, offers, and on and on. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them. Huge notebooks. Reference books. It takes a lot of time to go through all the relevant ones physically, in preparing to write copy for a client. Sometimes that's unavoidable, but quite often, for me, it is



Dan Kennedy's #7 No B.S. Time Truth

If you don't MANAGE information, you can't
profit from information.

not. Instead, I give my subconscious mind the assignment of going through its stored “swipe files” to find the right idea, “hook,” or starting point for a particular ad—*while I sleep* ! When I wake, the idea spews out through my fingers onto my computer screen. This is not a happy accident or some freakish mind mutation unique to me. It is the result of deliberate training with Psycho-Cybernetics. It probably liberates me from at least 20 hours of hard labor every month.