# Five productivity hacks for dealing with information overload

By Farren Roper                                                                              5 Mar 2018

We exist in a time where the amount of information being generated exceeds our given capacity to consume and process it.



© Burst via Pexels.

In today's knowledge-economy workplace collaboration is on the rise, with a trend to more project-based collaboration. In fact, people are in two times as many teams as many years ago. This means that we have a lot of information coming at us, at the same time in a non-linear fashion from multiple sources including emails, chat and social media.

And all the warning signs are that people are becoming more and more addicted to information. A *Harvard Business Review* article reported a study of workers in the United States which showed that 60% of people check email in the bathroom, 15% checked it at church and 11% have hidden the fact that they are checking it from a spouse.

What are the tools and resources that we can leverage to ensure that we cope and are able to be productive? Although it can be said that technology and access to information is part of the problem, technology can also be the solution. Here are my top 5 productivity hacks for dealing with information overload:

## 1. Understanding that not all information is created equal

Of all the information we must process, not all of it requires equal attention and prioritisation. Knowing which information needs to be dealt with at which time can make all the difference. The ability to flag information as high priority is arguably one of the best features ever incorporated into email. I also used to have emails, where I am cc 'd go into a separate box. But technology has advanced since then and staying on top of important information is now easier than ever.

How company culture affects productivity
Shae Leigh  2 Mar 2018

These days chat-based tools allow the people I collaborate with to flag information as important and people can also @mention me for information needing my direct attention. This gives me the ability to not only triage the information that is important and relevant but also to jump straight into what's urgent. Learning how to prioritise information has helped me make sense of the clutter, and technology now does the heavy lifting for me.

## 2. Know how to 'get it together'

Just as in life, there are always times when its necessary to 'get it together' and assimilation of information is no different. There are plenty of tools out there that can help you stay on top of information and keep your work organised. Whether you are using shared folders for a team or doing this on your personal drive, keeping information organised and sorted can help you save time. If your work circumstances mean that you are dealing with similar types of queries, knowing where to access the information you need quickly can make all the difference. And technology has made this even simpler.

Some of us are inherently disorganised at being organised, and there are tools to help us with that too. Technology is helping me keep important information organised, streamlined and accessible.

## 3. Work smart not hard

Data analytics tools can give you great tips and insights into whether you are working effectively or not. I find that this is a really insightful way of keeping myself honest on the level of my productivity.

A common myth is that people are productive when they multi-task. Many academic studies have debunked this myth as the most ineffective way to be productive. I see this as time that I am not being productive at all and spreading myself too thin. Instead, I like to focus my time going deep on 20% of the information that is going to deliver 80% of business impact. Instead of spending 2 hours doing 10 things, I set aside large chunks of time to work on my top 5 priorities. Technology is now helping me be smarter about how I am processing information and where I am spending my time.

## 4. Choose the tools according to your needs

When sharing information across your organisation, team or colleagues, choose the communication mechanism that is best suited to give you the best outcome. One of my pet peeves is an endless thread of emails around a topic that could be easily addressed in a ping or even a conversation. Having your inbox cluttered is never fun.

And chats have their own psychology, I can "like" a chat to acknowledge I have read it without having to send that needless email. My chosen communication medium is the one that allows me to service all my collaboration and communication needs in one place.

## 5. Information will fill the space you allow it

In today's time, if you chose to consume information 24/7/365 you could. And many times, the information does not come to us, but we actively seek it. I don't watch the news anymore, the news comes to me on my mobile device. I don't wait for project updates anymore, I follow channels or have connectors sending me information that's important to me. This has helped me grow my knowledge and be more productive, but it's also critical to know when enough is enough.

---

#BizTrends2018: Information overload - finding the 'right' kind of news

Gia Nicolaides  8 Jan 2018

---

Whether you believe in technology-free zones in your home or taking time to change your status to "do not disturb" it is super critical to give your brain periods of incubation to make sense of all the information that it is processing. So

sometimes I like to give myself the freedom and the space to be sane and disconnect from it all.

In times where the velocity of information is not likely to reduce, we need the right mechanism and tools to make sure that we stay productive. These are my top 5 hacks. I would love to learn more about yours.

## ABOUT FARREN ROPER

Microsoft global engagement lead for collaboration. Farren is also a divisional director for the Schools Division of the Advtech group appointed for his expertise on innovation and technology. Farren has his roots in technology and applications, having formerly founded his own businesses, run a dynamic internet service provider and taken to market Apps which have topped the South African App stores.
- Five productivity hacks for dealing with information overload - 5 Mar 2018
- Collaborate to unlock competitive advantage - 27 Sep 2016
- Marketers establishing their professional brand - 1 Apr 2016
- Top 10 social trends for 2016 - 1 Feb 2016
- How to go from a service provider to a trusted advisor - 27 Nov 2015

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com