<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>The new communications cornucopia. Is more better?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Trasenster, Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/2971">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/2971</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The New Communications Cornucopia. Is More Better?

Mark Trasenster
Managing Director, Reuters Business Briefing Products
Asia

Knowledge is power but access to the right information at the right time is what empowers the individual.
Walk into any office and it is not hard to spot the signs of information overload, desks piled high with paper, in trays spilling over, filing cabinets bulging, and shelves groaning under the weight of periodicals, box files, and books.
Are Facts raining down on you?
Do you feel overwhelmed?
if the answer is yes the chances are that like most of us you are suffering from information overload.
The symptoms are revealed in anxiety about a declining ability to digest and cope with the daily bombardment of data produced by an explosion in communications.
The condition is sometimes called Information Fatigue syndrome. It is not a new phenomenon. It was first detected among British and American intelligence decoders in the 2nd world War, who were under enormous pressure to decipher enormous numbers of cables, but of course could never catch up. Unfortunately it is becoming an increasingly common feature of modern life. David Shenk in his new book suggests that we suffer from an over rich diet of news stories, opinions, surveys, rumours and reports, many of them contradictory. To put it another way, we are starving at the feast of Information.
The result is that though we receive more information we have actually gained less knowledge. It also makes us bad tempered, gives us headaches, we lose concentration and it even leads to pc rage where computers are hit.
Reuters recently carried out a market survey to look beyond the obvious and try to analyse the cause and effects of too much information. In the subsequent publication called dying for information we found the following....

Stress in the work place
41% of respondents feel their working environment is extremely stressful on a day to day basis. 94% do not believe that the situation will improve and the majority, 56% believe that the future will be even more stressful, with the pressure of decisions and deadlines increasing.

The information paradox
66% of respondents claim that very high levels of information are required to perform effectively, but 43% believe that important decisions are delayed and judgement impaired as a result of having too much information. Are these the Information addicts? Yet another identified syndrome.

The business cost
38% of respondents believe that a substantial amount of time is wasted trying to locate the right information. 47% say that the collection of the information for decision making distracts managers from their main job responsibilities.

The human cost
85% of managers suffer from information overload. Of these 66% state that the resulting stress causes tension with colleagues, 42% cite ill health as a direct consequence, and 62% say that personal relationships suffer.

Inability to handle the quantity of information received
49% of managers are either very frequently or often unable to
handle the volumes of information they receive.

How did we get to this situation?
It is not just Reuters as an information provider that is the cause. The development of computers over the past 10 years must be to blame. The internet has grown into a global network allowing anyone with a PC, modem and telephone line to plug into a vast array of services, from sending messages round the world to downloading entire libraries. The E-Mail has a lot to answer for, as do mobile phones and ever more TV channels.

In the past 30 years we have churned out more words than in the previous 5,000 years. Every day we publish 1,000 new books and nearly 20 million words of technical data. It would take a reader 8 hours a day for 5 months to consume one days output of technical data.

This then leads to Paralysis by analysis. How can I make decisions when I see so many different and conflicting opinions?

What can we do about it?
Companies must formulate a proper Information strategy and ensure that it is championed at board level. Better Internal communication systems will ..... Enable more effective pre analysis of information so that managers only receive what they really need to know and this will also help cut out duplication of data.

Organisations should take a serious look at the way in which
they provide information to their employees. On line information services, such as Reuters Business Briefing, which archives over 3000 different publications can be a big help in cutting down on the piles of paper on peoples desks. They also allow relevant information to be located and retrieved quickly and simply. If you can get a computer to scan all the trade magazines and newspapers that you need to read to keep up with your market and present you with the important headlines and stories, why waste time and brain power doing it manually?

Intranets are the topic of the month and are growing in numbers rapidly. According to Market researcher Ovum, about 1.06 million intranet servers are currently in operation round the world. By the year 2002, this figure is predicted to have increased 6 fold to 6.8 million.

The primary use of intranets at present is the publishing and distribution of corporate information, but other uses, such as informal collaboration between colleagues and news distribution is set to increase sharply. When this happens, organisations will begin to rely on them more and more to perform many day to day functions. Intranets are likely to become as accepted a part of corporate life as the PC. Are they the answer to the Information problems. On their own I think not. They could actually be the start of the problems, for the Information professionals at least if not for the end users. End users will design their own pages, further distribute data in new forms and across National Boundaries leading to yet more problems.

What about the emerging technologies?
The development of a new technology known broadly as push may further transform the nature of the business and consumer information services in the near future, and also the way that intranets are used within organisations.

Push is so named because it allows information to be broadcast
in a continuous stream over the web making information retrieval effortless for the consumer, in contrast to the traditional pull internet search software which requires the user to surf the net, locate relevant information and download it.

True multicast technology of the type developed by Tibco, a Reuter Company allows one piece of information to be routed to many users simultaneously, decreasing network traffic.

For on line business information providers, “Push” presents a new and powerful way of delivering information to customers. Business information can be pushed onto corporate desktops, and companies, groups, and individuals can tune in to targeted news bulletins that correspond to pre defined user profiles. Users can specify what they need to know about, when they will receive the information, and in what format ie via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

Information delivered in this way is targeted, fast and timely; an attractive proposition for online vendors and corporate consumers.

Intranets create an instant publishing medium for entire corporations, and technologies such as ”push “create the ability to publish quickly and easily. All that is needed is genuinely useful content, which many intranets currently lack. It is as if everybody had a working television, but there were no programmes on any of the channels. This is Reuters’ opportunity. We have the ability to deliver relevant information to all levels of staff within an organisation and increase knowledge.

High quality, targeted business information will maximise the potential of a corporate intranet. It has the potential to have the same impact as spreadsheets had on the desk top PC.
Summary
We are suffering an avalanche of information, this is caused by the internet, e-mail and the pc as well as information technology.
We must manage the data, we must filter out the irrelevant and we must empower the end user to pre define what he wants to see. There is often a gulf between those responsible for disseminating or sourcing information and their IT department. The latter is not sufficiently aware of the formers needs and the former are not aware that the latter can help them solve their information problems.

Conclusion
Is more better yes and no. Access to more data is vital if you want to stay competitive, but only that which is relevant must be delivered to the end user. Companies have to move fast to prevent themselves drowning under a deluge of irrelevant data. Companies that just acquire data will drown in it, Companies that learn how to use the knowledge will benefit. This requires a disciplined approach, a clear strategy, and the selection of a Senior positioned Information Manager to filter the wheat from the chaff. The information Director, who will need the support of the Board could usefully combine some of the roles of the corporate strategy manager, the IT manager and the librarian. He will instigate information strategies and instal the technology to deliver the information services.

Companies must define what they mean by Information. Is it publications, memos, faxes, files, Industry or Country briefings or something else

Information professionals will definitely be in demand, cheap
direct access to volumes of data will not replace well honed information literacy.