Drowning in Information:
Proactively Managing the Onslaught

Sheila Taylor, CRM

If you are a "modern knowledge worker with several e-mail accounts, the latest smartphone and an insatiable appetite to know – that is, to consume all available information . . . [often] to the point of unhealthy and unproductive bombardment" – then *Information Bombardment: Rising Above the Digital Onslaught* is for you.

Divided into three parts, the book explores the many varied reasons for information bombardment, analyzes its implications, and offers some guidance for combating it.

Impacts of Information Overload

The first 11 chapters explore the context and issues related to information bombardment. Author Nick Bontis, Ph.D., examines why humans crave knowledge and illustrates how technological advances resulted in today's explosive volume of information.

He also illustrates how newer technologies that allow constant access to vast amounts of information, such as the Internet, negatively impact our quality of life because we lack the ability to filter, organize, and prioritize.

Chapters 12-16 address the impact of information bombardment for individuals, groups, organizations, and societal institutions (e.g., government):

- Individuals – Bontis examines the chronic stress of trying to manage too much information and how it negatively impacts personal relationships and impairs health by causing such things as memory loss.
- Groups – He discusses the "information hoarding" behavior that

emerges when knowledge sharing is not encouraged.
- Organizations – He explains why there is a loss of intellectual capital because knowledge is not easily transferred or codified, and knowledge obsolescence occurs at an alarming rate.
- Institutions – Bontis argues that the inability to efficiently and effectively convey information can have significant, widespread societal impacts. He uses as an example the deaths that might have been prevented during Hurricane Katrina had information sharing been better coordinated.

Solutions: In Short Supply

Chapters 17-20 provide "therapeutic solutions" or "prescriptions" for combating information bombardment. For the most part, these solutions are generalized ideas that don't cover new ground or offer specifics for implementation.

Bontis allocates just less than 200 pages to describing information bombardment, another 100 pages to examining its implications, and a mere 36 pages to providing guidance for combating it. This uneven distribution, coupled with his repetition of several examples, builds impatience and frustration.

The last part of the book is particularly unsatisfying given its brevity and the simplicity of many of the recommended solutions (e.g., use auto-foldering rules to tame your inbox). Bontis also provides little detail about organizational solutions in Chapter 19, instead referring the reader to several of his published articles. Because knowledge management is the au-
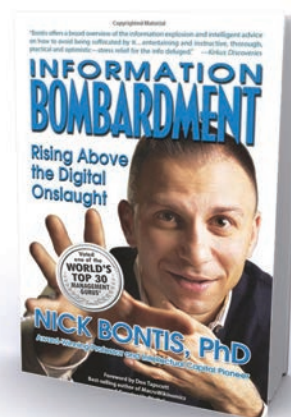
Information Bombardment: Rising Above the Digital Onslaught
Author: **Nick Bontis, Ph.D.**
Publisher: **Institute for Intellectual Capital Research Inc.**
Publication Date: **2011**
Length: **432 pages**
Price: **$28.95**
ISBN-13: **978-0-9867945-0-6**
Source: *: www.iicr.ca*

thor's recognized field of expertise, this should have been the strongest section of the book.

The book lacks a final, summarizing chapter or footnotes for the numerous cited statistics and studies. While the further readings at the end of each chapter presumably include the sources of the cited items, a reader shouldn't have to work that hard to find a source.

Parting (from Information) Is Sweet Sorrow

Information Bombardment is engaging and easy to read, and the author uses humor and anecdotes to illustrate many of his arguments. For example, he illustrates how information bombardment has negatively affected him (and his family) by

recounting his inability to enjoy the beauty of a Grecian sunset when he couldn't get reception on his Black-Berry. However, while an entertaining read for general audiences and marketed as a resource for "working smarter, not harder," the book's value to records and information management (RIM) practitioners is somewhat limited.

RIM practitioners can benefit from the book in two ways. First, they can leverage through RIM training and communications the insights as to why employees find it so difficult to part with information. Second, they can gain an appreciation into how many employees, managers, and other stakeholders interact with information and learn about the infor-mation management solutions offered by providers. It is prudent for RIM practitioners to be aware of such perspectives, especially when (as in *Information Bombardment*) they do not consider RIM best practices. **END**

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Needed: An Information Consultant

Clare Cameron

For information management professionals working in large organizations, the idea of being an independent consultant can have universal appeal: working from home in your favorite sweatpants, choosing your own hours, and getting away from corporate politics. The reality of consulting as a career, however, can be extremely challenging and uncertain. *Information Consulting: Guide to Good Practice* offers a basic foundation for understanding the skills and talents required for success in this unique and growing field.

Information Consulting is co-authored by three individuals with ample academic and professional experience in library and information studies, information science, and IT. Irene Wormell, Annie Olesen, and Gábor Mikulás offer a broad and high-level perspective on the information consulting profession from their years spent working internationally. The publication is relatively short, simply worded, and easy to navigate as a practical handbook for assessing skills and establishing standards for an information consulting business.

The authors target the information consulting beginner and offer very lit-tle knowledge of the dynamics and processes involved in consulting. This is an unfortunate shortcoming, as much of *Information Consulting* reads as a fairly generic how-to guide on consulting best practices for all professionals. While effective communication, networking, and relationship building are described as essential skills for consulting success, these points will come as no surprise to readers who have even a basic understanding of essentials in the typical consultant-client relationship.

An entire section on business planning similarly reads as a quick guide for starting any new entrepreneurial venture. With all of their combined years of experience, it is disappointing that the authors do not distinguish this aspect of *Information Consulting* more clearly from other general consulting guides available in the marketplace today.

The authors' practical knowledge finally shines through in the final chapters, where they offer an impressive collection of real-client feedback and case studies. An overview of current issues in the information management industry, along with a discussion of changes affecting traditional librarian
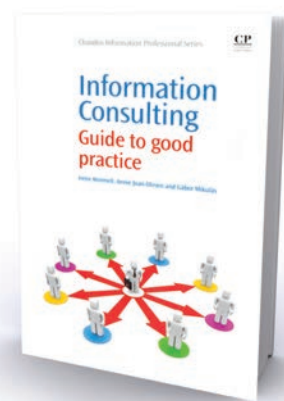
Information Consulting: Guide to Good Practice
Authors: **Irene Wormell, Annie Joan Olesen, and Gábor Mikulás**
Publisher:Chandos Publishing
Publication Date: **2011**
Pages: **218**
Price: **$45**
ISBN-13: **978-1-84334-662-3**
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www.chandospublishingonline.com

roles, covers some of the current issues facing information professionals.

At this point, the authors use straightforward and engaging language to illustrate the genuine challenges and possible routes to success in several real-life information consulting scenarios. This is an outstanding and truly beneficial section, as it offers the

most particular and believable illustration of the complexity involved in consulting on information management issues as a profession.

Throughout *Information Consulting,* the authors reference an impressive collection of academic and media publications, including client surveys from existing information consultant partnerships. Readers will gain an extensive bibliography for further research on the information consulting industry.

Common measures for organizational dynamics, such as the Hofstede

and Trompenaars scales, are also referenced as a way of placing the information consulting field in a broader business context alongside such issues as power distance, assertiveness, and uncertainty avoidance.

While the introduction of *Information Consulting* suggests that readers will receive an in-depth look at this unique branch of consulting services, the authors offer plenty of good, but wide-ranging, advice that could apply to anyone interested in starting a management consulting career.

Though the book will be most valu-

able as an initial starting point for understanding the idea of information consulting, more experienced readers will appreciate the real-life scenarios, practical checklists, and case study appendices. Perhaps the authors will consider issuing an expanded edition of this guide, offering more specific advice and recommendations directly from their own experiences as independent information consultants. **END**

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The Shifting Landscape of
Electronic Personal Information

Andrew Altepeter

The way people create, store, and manage their personal information is in the midst of a radical transformation. In the course of a few short decades, most people will have moved from paper to local electronic storage to largely cloud-based solutions to manage their information.

In the coming years, correspondence, personal photographs, critical medical and financial records, and other personal records not only will be stored electronically, but they also will be accessed through websites hosted remotely across countless servers in different parts of the world.

This presents numerous new challenges, both for individuals hoping to manage the infinitely expanding amount of personal information and for information professionals who hope to preserve it for business use or historical study.

Getting Ahead of the Curve

Unfortunately, the literature in

personal information management always seems to be one step behind the moving target and, according to Christopher A. Lee in his publication *I Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era,* "limited to a few scattered journal articles and research project websites." This book, featuring nine other contributors, is a forward-looking attempt to fill that gap and bring experts from other fields into a new, unified body of literature.

Lee divides the book into three parts. The first deals with the foundations of personal collections; the second identifies the types of electronic personal information; and the third offers strategies for managing these types of data. Each part contains several chapters offering approaches to the larger themes by authors from a variety of backgrounds.

In his opening chapter, Lee identifies two existing streams of literature from which he draws personal
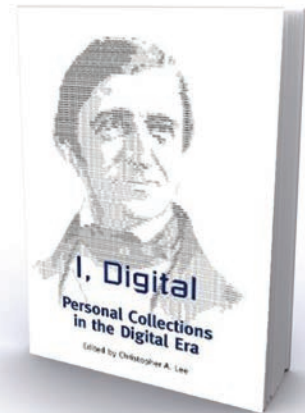
I Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era
Author: **Christopher A. Lee**
Publisher: **Society of American Archivists**
Publication Date: **2011**
Length: **384 pages**
Price: **$70**
ISBN-13: **978-0838911556**
Source: *: www.archivists.org*

information management (PIM) and archives and records management (ARM). Traditionally, PIM has emphasized the ways individuals create

and manage their own information, and ARM represents the methods organizations and institutions use to manage and preserve their collective information.

However, the boundaries between these two fields are quickly disappearing as individuals often co-mingle their personal information with work information, and IT organizations move toward a "bring-your-own-device" model.

Grappling with the Issues

Readers will find useful updates to traditional archival concepts. The abundance of cheap storage, search technologies, multiple provenances, and Web 2.0 applications (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Flikr) fundamentally impact information management and ownership issues.

One only needs to access a corporation's Facebook page to see that the information exchange between the organization and its customers has fundamentally changed. Internal social media and wikis, each mingling company data with employee personal information, add further complexity.

I Digital is backed by scholarly sources cited in easily accessible endnotes, and a detailed bibliography offers a starting point for readers looking to further explore and develop the challenges and opportunities in personal information management.

An issue the book's contributors often overlook is the growing challenge surrounding data privacy and the protection of personally identifiable information, perhaps due to the bias toward museums and archives, rather than organizations that manage active records. A spirited discussion addressing the tension between the need to make active records accessible and the need to protect personal information in cloud-based environments would strengthen the book.

Learning from Other Disciplines

Readers of *Information Management* will find much of use within *I Digital*. The challenges of archivists who manage personal collections are often similar to those as corporate information governance professionals who must ensure access, preservation and integrity across rapidly transforming platforms of digital storage and collaboration on employee-owned devices.

Perhaps even more important, *I Digital* invites information governance professionals to a discussion on personal collections that had long been reserved to archivists, librarians, and museum professionals. This inclusive approach will ensure that information professionals with unique goals are nevertheless able to learn from principles and methods of the other. **END**

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