Working Effectively in the Age of the Internet
By Jeff Davidson

The typical working man or woman today works in front of a computer and while that may not be earth shaking, because so much of the work involves the web, major problems have arisen. Unquestionably, the web allows us to execute both functions with greater speed and ease than ever before. Internet access also represents a dilemma for managers and staff.

Each time a person goes on to the web, however, potentially he or she is subject to the temptation of visiting a few favorite sites, checking the news, seeing what mail has come in and perhaps sending out mail as well.

How does one function effectively in the face of the irresistible force that the Internet represents? Anyone and everyone is subject to its lure. Like the call of the sirens, day and night, each of us is fully aware that a wonderland of news, information, entertainment, colors, sounds, messages from friends and offers from afar, both worthy and absurd, are ours to behold simply by getting online.

What's needed today is a new orientation toward work and the tools of technology that support us while offering the double-edged sword of endlessly tempting us to fritter away our time. Here are suggestions:

* Keep a timer by your computer, and anytime you visit the Internet or check email beyond what is strictly necessary to execute the task at hand, time yourself. A minute and a half to three minutes, a few times a day, is acceptable. One long bout of ten or fifteen minutes before lunch, during lunch, or just after lunch is understandable. More than that and you're stealing from your employer.

* Schedule those times each day, or establish a daily routine, when you will allow yourself to visit the Internet and/or check messages for personal reasons. Then hold to such a schedule.

* When you really want to get things done, and your work does not require visiting the web, remove the connection if you can do so easily, work on a computer that is not connected to the web, or make a pact with yourself that for 60, 90, or 120 minutes you will not digress.

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