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Our culture over-stimulates each of us

By Jeff Davidson

Online or offline, we are besieged by more information and communication than previous generations could ever imagine. In the course of a single second, hundreds of years' worth of new information becomes available based on average human intake capacities. In other words, in the next second, more television and radio programming; more books, magazines, newspapers, and print publications; more journals, government reports, industry studies, newsletters, and fact sheets; and more advertisements, commercials, promotions, and sales pitches will be produced than anyone could intellectually ingest in the next hundred years.

With each following second, the phenomenon repeats itself. On Youtube alone, thousands of hours of new video footage is added each day.

Predictably, we've reached the stage in our socio-cultural evolution where the number of items competing for one's time and attention greatly outstrips anyone's ability to keep up. No president, prime minister, king or queen, noble laureate, head of world religion, head of a university, scientist, researcher, or guru of any sort has a lock on the future of world events and human endeavors

The bombardment has reached such epidemic levels that virtually every aspect of one's life is dominated by messages. From airport TV monitors to advertising on the wall above urinals in restrooms, the spaces and places in our lives are now depositories for more messages and information to which we must attend. No arena in our professional or personal lives is unscathed.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health report No. 99-101, titled Stress at Work, reports

that "The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health of organizations."

Buy an airline ticket and the federal regulations that accompany your ticket exceed 8,000 words, equivalent to two chapters of a novel. Purchase a new home and encounter a bewildering array of forms, documents, pledges, and assurances you must sign—double the number of 15 years ago.

In autumn 1988, I had my first glimmer of the coming era of complexity that now fully submerges us. It dawned on me back then that geometric growth in population, the volume of new information generated each day, media growth in terms of technological capability and global coverage, the volume of paper generated even as electronic information capabilities began

to accelerate, and the over-abundance of choices that confronted people in all aspects of their lives would lead to a future much like the one we are experiencing right now.

Unfortunately, the typical person has little understanding of the larger forces at play. For people under age 30, this non-stop, 24x7 world is all they've ever known. For them, there never has been a quieter, slower pace to life. They cannot conceive of a world before ubiquitous cell phones, the Web, and cable television, let alone with less noise and about half the traffic. For those over 30, we wonder if the pace of life will ever return to something more manageable. So far, the prognosis is cloudy.

Jeff Davidson is a professional speaker and author of numerous books including his latest, "Simpler Living: A Back to Basics Guide to Cleaning, Furnishing, Storing, De-cluttering, Streamlining, Organizing, and More" (Skyhorse Publishing).