



Business Edge

## Internet Addiction and its Perils

by Jeff Davidson | Dec 15, 2014 ([Leave a comment](#))

A wide variety of surveys indicate that Internet addiction is intensifying. Since 1994, the year that popular Internet browsers became widely available for the masses, psychologists have been concerned about the power and appeal that the Internet has over our people.

Add it all up: incessant Web surfing; over-allegiance to discussion groups; fixation on online pornography; gambling and games; music, movie and other media downloading; and a wide variety of other fixations. What comes to mind? A portrait emerges of a society—and indeed a world—sitting on its derriere, breezing through one screen after another.

By some estimates, as many as 10 percent of Web users are living with one or more forms of Internet dependency, which has now been given the name of Internet Addiction Disorder, or IAD. IAD, as acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association, is characterized by individuals who devote gargantuan amounts of time to online activities to the detriment of their careers, studies, families or loved ones, and social and community participation.

### **Growing Signs**

You don't need a battery of tests to know whether or not the Internet is starting to become intrusive in your life. If you find yourself spending increasing amounts of time online and experiencing a growing sense of anxiety when you're not online, you may be at risk. What's more, the phenomena is not confined to just the Internet. People who check their cell phones, pagers, telephone answering devices, and any electronic information or communication gizmos on a too-frequent basis may be exhibiting addictive behavior. Consider your balance of activities in the last year. Are you spending less time devoted to career, community, social and recreational pursuits because of the amount of time you find yourself online? You know you've gone too far when you're experiencing relationship woes, loss of friendships, loss of sleep, and in particular, career or academic jeopardy.

If you find yourself checking email all day long, or constantly jumping on the Web to catch the news, keep up with some discussion group, or troll your favorite sites, while other aspects of your life get short shrift, it may be time for some

self-reflection. The key to overcoming any addiction is to first acknowledge that you indeed are afflicted. Following that acknowledgment, you then have to summon the requisite motivation to change. Without realization and motivation, nothing is likely to happen.

Unquestionably, the Internet is a marvel of our age. The ability to find answers, make connections, order goods, satisfy curiosities and control the vast sea of knowledge contained therein is certainly enticing. It boggles my mind to think what Da Vinci, Newton, Einstein, and other geniuses throughout human history could have achieved aided by the knowledge they gained through using the Internet. At the same time, such geniuses, being all too human, may, too, have fallen into some of the same traps in which we mere mortals now find ourselves firmly ensconced.

### **Striking a Balance**

The Internet both giveth and taketh away. As with so many aspects of life, the key is to use the Internet effectively to achieve a fine balance. It has become a major, and indeed, vital part of the lives of many of its devotees. It would be hard now to imagine a world in which the Internet does not exist. Since it's here to stay, now is as good a time as any to set some boundaries to help define why, how, and when we're going to use this wondrous technology. First, if this works for you, establish a time limit for daily use. Thirty minutes a day may not be enough; three hours may be excessive. At work, depending on your job responsibilities, all day may be the norm. Thus, your task is to choose the limits for your personal life.

Recognize that excessive Web use may be the indicator of problems in other aspects of your life. Are you devoting time here because there are voids elsewhere? Or are you using the Internet as a tool of procrastination in shirking your responsibilities? If you recognize that you're using the Internet to avoid the challenges of life, shying away from battles that need to be fought, it might be a good idea to speak to a therapist.

Most of us surf the net alone. But if you find reading up on the news or keeping current in some other pursuit is rewarding and enjoyable, you don't have to forsake your family or friends in the process. Can you arrange your space so that you and your significant other, you and your children, or you and others can be online at the same time in close proximity, so that, much like playing cards, you achieve a variation on the theme of togetherness? This may go a long way toward alleviating some of the problems that excessive time on the Internet is causing. In any case, when the measure of your time on earth is finally taken, and you're down to your last few days, how rewarding will it be to reflect back on the several thousand hours a year you averaged on the Internet over the course of your life?

### **About the Author**

*Jeff Davidson, CMC, MBA, is The Work-Life Balance Expert®. A speaker at many large companies, Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance. He supports this quest through his websites [www.BreathingSpace.com](http://www.BreathingSpace.com) and [www.Work-LifeBalance.net](http://www.Work-LifeBalance.net). Jeff can be reached at [jeff@breathingspace.com](mailto:jeff@breathingspace.com)*