

Information overload and what it means to your message

I just got back from a few days of vacation in Florida. During my five days off, which included the weekend, I had limited Internet access. I was able to access email on my phone, and use WiFi on my laptop a couple of times.

Emails galore.

Every single day I had around 70 emails—of which only two or three were addressed to me exclusively. The rest were marketing emails, listserv stuff, and subscription emails I get every day. I deleted most of these messages without reading.

Lots of stuff on my reader.

Then, there was my Feedly to check. I had limited time to read through, so I marked a great amount of as read, and looked only at a very few items.

Twitter keeps going and going and going...

If you only check Twitter once a day or so, it is impossible to keep up with what is going on. You check your @ replies and your direct messages, and what is there in the general stream at that moment.

Facebook is congestion central.

Some people post every once in a while and others post ALL the time (like my young cousin who posts every thought and feeling he has plus every image/story he finds interesting). Mobile Facebook reminds you of people's birthdays or I would have missed congratulating my friends Jordan and Dan.

How did I deal with information overload? I prioritized the

personal and business-related and skimmed the rest.

What does information overload mean for your message?

It means, quite simply, that your message is very likely to get lost.

People are getting bombarded with information from many sources, and if they don't keep up with it immediately, they are forced to ignore it and/or delete it. There just isn't enough time in the day to get stuff done (or take a vacation) and read all your emails and other messages.

How do we, as communicators, deal with this problem?

1.) Realize that **your message is competing very hard for attention.**

2.) Realize that your message may need both **reach and frequency** with the caveat that frequency is part of the problem for the receiver. Sending the same message too many times can be annoying or part of overload...but it may break through the clutter.

3.) Realize that **timing is key.** You will have to figure out when is the best time to reach most of your subjects, while understanding that you will never reach everyone at the same time.

4.) Realize that **relevance is what is most important.** If the message is not relevant to your subject, it will more easily be deleted or ignored.

Thoughts on this? How do you deal with information overload?