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-
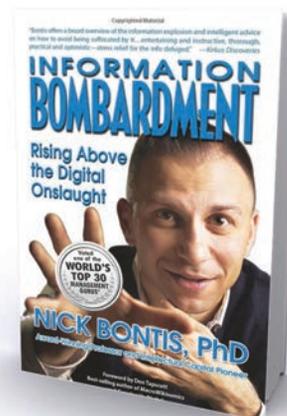
Information Bombardment: Rising Above the Digital Onslaught
Author: **Nick Bontis, Ph.D.**
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thor's recognized field of expertise, this should have been the strongest section of the book.

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**

Sheila Taylor, CRM, can be contacted at staylor@eimc.ca. *See her bio on page 47.*