



Internet addiction not pretty

by Jeff Davidson

A variety of surveys are beginning to indicate that Internet addiction is intensifying. When you add it all up -- incessant Web surfing; over-allegiance to chat rooms, forums and discussion groups; fixation on online pornography, gambling and games; music, movie and other media downloading; and a wide variety of other fixation -- the portrait of a society and indeed a world sitting on its derriere, breezing through one screen after another emerges.

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.

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 phenomenon is not confined to the Internet per se. 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. 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.

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, 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 could have gained 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.

As with so many aspects of life, the key to using the Internet effectively is to achieve a fine balance. 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 whoever can be online at the same time in close proximity, such as at the same table, so that, much like playing cards or a board game, you

achieve a variation on the theme of togetherness. That in itself may go a long way towards alleviating some of the problems that excessive time on the Internet may be causing.

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