

## Internet addiction is not pretty

By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

A wide variety of surveys is beginning to 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 the Internet has.

By some estimates, as many as 10 percent of web users are living with one or more forms of Internet dependency, which has 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.

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 phenomenon isn't 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.

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 e-mail 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 might be time for some self-confession. The key to overcoming any addiction is to first acknowledge that you indeed are afflicted. Then you then have to summon the motivation to change.

Without realization and motivation, nothing is likely to happen.

It boggles my mind to think what da Vinci, Newton, Einstein and other geniuses could have achieved aided by the knowledge they could have gained using the Internet. At the same time, such geniuses may too have fallen into the same traps we have.

The Internet both giveth and taketh away. As with so many aspects of life, the key to using the Internet effectively is to achieve a fine balance.

It has become a major and indeed vital part of the lives of many of its devotees.

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 you don't have to forsake your family or friends.

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 may go a long way toward alleviating some of the problems that excessive time on the Internet may be causing.

In any case, when the measure of your time on earth is finally taken, 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?

Jeff Davidson is a life-work balance expert who has written 56 books. His websites are [www.BreathingSpace.com](http://www.BreathingSpace.com) and [www.Work-LifeBalance.net](http://www.Work-LifeBalance.net).