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MOTD



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motd

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Data Overload

Boy have I been pounded with data lately. Not information, mind you, which *Websters Dictionary* cites as a synonym, but rather data. Information connotes to me a certain amount of data-processing, organization, and even distillation. Data is just raw facts, figures, random prose, and even sometimes erroneous conclusions.

I have cut back on the number of trade magazines I get. I find that once I read a few in a particular field the rest just covered the same data in varying levels of details. However, this has not really helped my overload situation.

I try to keep up with parts of the hardware world at <<http://www.eetimes.com>>. That's only 30-60 minutes/week (depending on the number of breakthroughs :)).

I also try to keep up with the software world (including open systems/open source) and boy does that eat up time! Multiple periodicals, and Web sites (even slashdot), digested newsletters (*NewsScan* is my favorite; it saves hours of reading; send a "subscribe" message to <NewsScan@NewsScan.com>). Their competitors over at *Newsbytes* do a good job, too.

The most difficult part of the problem is figuring out what information is real and what is just self-serving press releases. I am continually astounded at those who put credence in statements/data issued/uttered by people paid to do so!

Our local newspaper headline from Friday was: "Microsoft Fortress Penetrated." Fortress? That's the terminology used in their the press release.

"Isn't XYZ operating system more secure? Their literature says it is." "The ABC filesystem was created for speed, wasn't it?" "PDQ OS was designed to incorporate networking from the ground up; wouldn't that be better than UNIX's 'grafted on' networking?" So many sound bites, so little time.

"Its peak capacity is over 100 Mbits/second!" "The printer says its maximum speed is 24 pages per minute" It's hard to explain to people reading such specs that these sorts of assertions mean: "The company will give you a written guarantee that never in all of time will their device exceed this specification." Not much of a warranty, I'll aver.

And the data glut continues. Everyone who puts fingers to keyboard feels he is an expert in computing and can comment expertly on security, performance, ease-of-use, clock speeds, computer power, and data buses. I'm sorry if this sounds a bit bitter, but winnowing the chaff is ever more challenging these days as the industry jargon penetrates the popular vocabulary.

I know people who regularly receive more than 500 email messages per day. They have elaborate schemes for filing this data – often with automatic filing that takes place before they even see the message! Of course, few humans have time to digest this many messages and we often hear them wailing: "Oh, I'm buried in email," the sub-text connoting "... buried in important messages."

I know I can barely keep up and I don't even have a full-time job (at this writing) to keep me occupied for a third of each day.

I write this not to complain but to lead up to a suggested course of action. When you are fed data that is not so very useful or even data that is so slanted as to be useless, say so! Say, "Hey, this doesn't help. Here's what I need . . ."

I know marketing drives our economy, but the "lowest common denominator" is now too low for many of my needs. Lets see if we can work together to raise the bar a bit.