

# Information hygiene

## Key concepts

Addiction to Internet applications - a behaviour disorder leading to an uncontrolled use of these applications.

Information overload - a condition in which there is too much information available.

Spam - a junk message sent to discussion groups or e-mail addresses.

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## 1. Addiction to Internet applications

Modern information and communication technologies and the Internet have many advantages; however, there are possible hidden risks in them as well. A person may get so interested in their use that they are no longer capable of a rational control of their behaviour, which has a negative impact on their daily life. Without doubt, everyone has experienced interest in an Internet application, be it a social network or a game. In this chapter you will learn to recognize possible addictive behaviour and to prevent it, since **anyone can become addicted** and prevention is thus the most important thing.

Addiction to Internet applications is considered a **behaviour disorder** leading to an **uncontrolled and harmful use** of these technologies. Addicts prefer such activities to an involvement in the real life, which causes problems within their families and at work.



To draw a line between a hobby, an increased interest and an addiction is difficult partly because people become **mentally addicted to computers, not physically**.

### 1.1 Types of addiction to Internet applications

Among typical examples of addictive behaviour are the following:

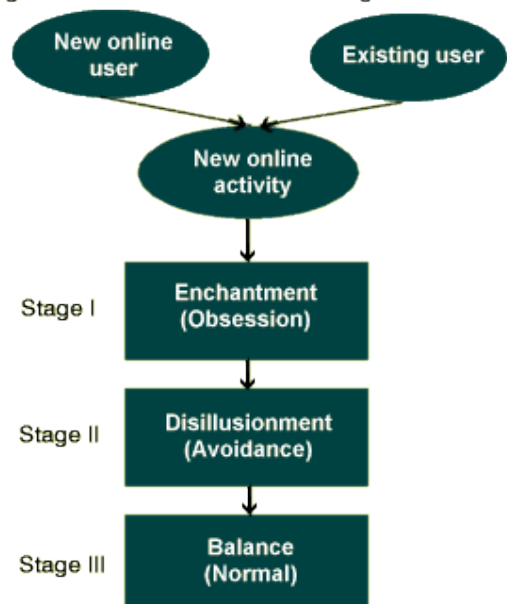
- Excessive playing of PC games.
- An excessive amount of time spent on Internet communication.
- An excessive amount of time spent on Internet pornography.
- Internet gambling.
- An excessive tendency towards shopping online, taking part in Internet auctions etc.
- An excessive acquisition of unnecessary information - pointless surfing, data downloading.
- An excessive amount of time spent on working - even during one's days off or holidays, e.g. checking the corporate e-mail.

In the picture we can see **Grohol's model of pathological Internet use**.

Using new technologies begins with a fascination with the possibilities they offer. This fascination naturally decreases in time and one starts to use the given application in a balanced way. However, in case the user does not get over the period of fascination and, on the contrary, the intensity of use increases, we may speak of addictive behaviour.

New online user, existing online user. New online activities. Phase 1 - Fascination (obsession). Phase 2 - Disillusionment (avoidance). Phase 3 - Balance (normal use).

Figure 1. Grohol's Model of Pathological Internet Use



**A typical example of addiction may be a young man named Tom.**

- Tom does not have many friends and is not particularly physically fit.
- Though nobody knows, Tom has one more identity in the virtual environment of an online game. His name there is Wolfhound and he is a brave fabled hero.
- He is well-received and respected by the virtual community and has many friends.
- In that environment he feels good and spends as much time there as possible.
- His virtual identity has become a reflection of his true wishes and ideas.

## 1.2 Symptoms and negative impacts of addictive behaviour

If most of the below-mentioned symptoms occur for more than 3 months and the time spent online is 6 hours per day and longer, we may speak of addictive behaviour.

You show **symptoms of addictive behaviour** if you:

- often think of computer activities,
- have failed to reduce the amount of time spent online,
- are restless or depressed whenever you reduce the amount of time spent online,
- usually spend more time online than you originally intended,
- can feel negative impacts of the amount of time spent online on the real relationships or work,
- have ever lied about the amount of time spent online,
- see your computer as a way to escape your problems.

Among other symptoms are euphoria when one is engaged in computer and online activities, neglecting friends or family, lack of sleep because of online activities etc. We can say that **addiction begins when** one's computer activity serves exclusively to satisfy one's interests, and the time spent online has a negative impact on daily life.



The number of hours spent on the computer is not a relevant way of assessing a possible addiction. If you spend long hours studying or working on your computer, there is no reason to fear addiction (beware of workaholism though).

An overuse of the computer may have a negative impact on human body. **The risks can be divided into three basic categories.**

Physical	Mental	Social
Backache, arthrodynia, eye pain	Bad time management	Worsening of interpersonal relations
Neglecting one's own body	Worsened progress at school	A decrease in the number of real friends
Lack of sleep	Worsened progress at work	A risk of cybernetic bullying
Irregular eating	A possible increase in aggressiveness	A risk of personal data misuse
Lack of physical exercise	A risk of alcohol and drug abuse	Property crime on Internet

### 1.3 Methods of addictive behaviour prevention

There is no need to apply all of the following methods and recommendations for preventing addictive behaviour at once. It is up to you what will inspire you and what you will use. Based on the following points, think about your relationship to computers. An important method of **addiction prevention is to limit** your access and time spent on your computer. Before you start working, write down a list of tasks; this will help you work faster and more effectively.

- Carry on activities different from computers, e.g. sports.
- Remind yourselves of negative impacts of a computer overuse (e.g. backache).
- Try to spend some time without your computer.
- If you start thinking of online activities, be passive and forget them.
- Work offline.
- Limit the amount of time you spend online - set an alarm clock.
- Set an alarm clock, so you know when to leave.

You should not work on your computer unless all more important duties are done, e.g. your studies, work, family. An **advisable limit** is a maximum of 2 hours a day for adults and teenagers, and 1 hour a day for children.

An example of a limited amount of time spent on the computer:

- A 7-year-old child is allowed to spend 1.5 h online on Saturdays and Sundays.
- A 15-year-old teenager is allowed 1 hour a day after they do their homework and complete all other duties. On weekends, it is possible to allow 2 hours a day.
- A 20-year-old student may go online in the evening after he/she has studied, e.g. from 10 p.m. to 11.30 p.m.
- A married person with children may spend 1 hour online each evening when the children are asleep.

## 2. Safety in social networks

Social networks are online services which enable you to create a public or a semi-public profile. You can look at other users' profiles, share information and interact in various ways (e.g. chats, discussion groups). Nowadays social networks are developing fast and come into existence for a number of reasons, e.g. interests, work, religion. They bring many positive aspects into

interpersonal communication; however, there are hidden risks in them as well. In this chapter we will deal with the principles of safe behaviour in social networks.

### Social networks present 3 basic risks:

- One may become addicted to social networks.
- Social networks may become a source of information overload (too much information).
- One's personal data may be misused.

Social networks have brought the trend of anonymity loss, i.e. publishing personal data, photos, videos etc. under real names. Information published in such a way may be misused. It is advisable to observe the basic rules of safe behaviour and protect personal data against misuse.

### Information which is the most frequent target of misuse:

- Your access passwords
- Your bank account data. Credit card numbers.
- Your e-mail address where people may send spams.
- Information stored in your computer.

## 2.1 Rules of safe behaviour in social networks

Consider the circumstances under which you will give your personal data. Common sense and caution are the most powerful tools of protection. Try to **follow basic rules** in social networks:

- If possible, do not give away your full name and surname. Use a nick or an abbreviation. Do not enter the date and place of your birth.
- **Do not give away your address**, phone number, e-mail or information about your family.
- While registering for internet services, use an e-mail address specifically intended for this purpose.
- Create **complicated access passwords** and change them regularly. Do not tell them to anyone.
- **Do not tell** people online that you are **planning to be away from home**, especially if they know your address.
- Do not rely on the fact that you know with whom you communicate online.
- **Do not rely on your privacy settings** in social networks.
- Consider carefully all the people you want to add to your friends list.
- Protect your prestige and reputation. **Do not carry on any activity online while drunk.**
- Think twice about the photos and videos you publish. Do not publish photos with other people without their consent.

## 2.2 Netiquette - rules of behaviour in social networks

Even the Internet environment has a set of rules telling you how to behave there. These rules are called netiquette - or, net etiquette.

1. You should not use your computer to harm other people.
2. You should not prevent other people from working online.
3. You should not snoop in other people's files.
4. You should not use your computer to steal.
5. You should not use your computer to spread tales.
6. You should not use or copy programs you have not paid for.
7. You should not use resources in other people's computers without permission.
8. You should not challenge other people's right to use their intellect.
9. You should think of the social relevance of the program you are writing.
10. You should use your computer with respect and consideration.

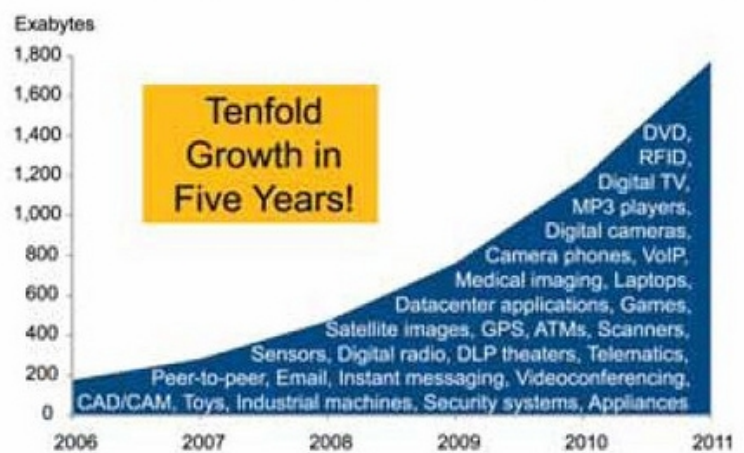
### 3. Information overload

Information overload is becoming an issue in today's society. Every day we have to take in more and more useless information, be it on the Internet, in e-mails, discussion groups, social networks, on TV, in advertisements, radios, mobile phones, magazines, scientific articles etc., and have to select information which is useful to us. In order to **manage information overload**, we may adopt a **suitable approach** to information. In this chapter we will introduce methods of managing information overload.

**Information production is constantly increasing.** In the picture, you can see how information production has multiplied in the course of a few years. Don't you sometimes think that it is too much?

Information overload may cause the **fatigue information syndrome**. This syndrome was defined by the psychologist David Lewis as a condition in which one is exposed to an excessive influence of information. Information overload has a **negative impact on health**. It may show through fatigue, headache, insomnia, irritation, memory problems or stress.

Digital Information Created, Captured, Replicated Worldwide



#### 3.1 Information overload prevention methods

These methods may help you reduce information overload while working with the Internet, as well as in everyday life.

- Before you start searching online, **determine the kind of information** you need. Do not waste time surfing pointlessly.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not look for discussion groups. If you search for particular pieces of information in them, ignore the rest of the threads.
- Set a **suitable homepage**. There are search engines without disturbing advertisements, and are thus more suitable.

- Reduce watching television. Advertisements are a significant element of information overload. Do not turn **your television on as a background**.
- Inform everyone as to what means of communication you prefer, and communicate in that way.
- Decide what kind of **information sources it is beneficial to follow**.

A suitable means of making your work more effective and reducing information overload is adopting the methods of time management and GTD (Getting Things Done).



### RSS

A suitable tool for reducing information overload is the RSS tool (Rich Site Summary). If you visit some websites on a regular basis in order to get new information, RSS is an ideal solution which will save you a lot of time. RSS is a technology which notifies users of new information (news, articles etc.) on selected websites. This way there is no need for you to visit the same websites every day - new information shows automatically in one spot, and thus saves your time.

## 3.2 E-mail

E-mail may become a significant source of information overload. It is therefore advisable to learn to use this communication tool effectively. The basic rules of an **effective use of e-mail** are:

- Disable notifications of new e-mails.
- Do not let incoming e-mails distract you from your current task.
- **Resist the temptation to constantly check** your e-mail box.
- **Determine the time** when you will check your e-mails. Check your e-mail box twice a day at most when you have nothing important to do.
- **Use an idle time period** to check your e-mails (e.g. in the train).
- In order for a message to be read at all in a full e-mail box, it must have a **well-chosen subject**.

*Do you know the initiative [jen.petvet.cz](http://jen.petvet.cz)?*

*In other words, a simple piece of advice on how to use e-mail in an effective way.*

## Spams

Usually we do not even know that a spam has been sent to our e-mail address. A spam filter mostly detects such messages in our e-mail client and does not deliver them. However, if an unwanted message is delivered, we recommend observing the following **basic rules**:

- **Do not open suspicious messages** or reply to them. You would only confirm that your e-mail address is active. Delete such messages via the “delete as spam” command.
- Spams sometimes contain images or links; do not open them.
- **Do not resend chain letters**; by doing so you might unintentionally become an author of spam.
- Do not give away your address on websites, in advertisements, in discussion forums. Spammers use special robots (spambots) in order to find e-mail addresses.

Spam can be divided into basic categories.

Type of spam	How do we recognize spam?
Hoax	It describes a danger, relates the devastating effects of a virus, spreads tales, dangers, refers to a reliable source.
Phishing	It tries to obtain confidential information about e-banking and to act as an institution where you have an account, describes made-up problems, contains links to fraudulent websites.
Fake lotteries	Such messages inform you of an imaginary prize and try to entice a sum of money from you.
SCAM 419	Such fraudulent messages are called "Nigerian letters". They usually ask for a transfer of money for a provision. Their aim is to entice sums of money from people.
Chain e-mails	They have no information value and unnecessarily increase information overload.

## Conclusion

The text objective was to acquaint you with the most important topics of **information hygiene**, which may appear in your everyday lives. Let us summarize the most important points:

- **Addiction** to Internet applications may be considered a **behaviour disorder** leading to an uncontrolled and harmful use of these applications. Addiction may come **in many forms**, e.g. playing games or excessive Internet communication.
- Addiction to Internet applications and resulting excessive use of the computer have **negative impacts on human body** - physical, mental and social. It is advisable to adopt methods of prevention.
- **Social networks** may also become a source of excessive information, which brings no benefit. It is necessary to observe the **rules of safe behaviour** - above all, you should avoid mentioning your personal data, and adjust your privacy settings accordingly.
- General internet behaviour has its rules, called **netiquette**. Observing these rules cannot be enforced by law; however, the given Internet community usually requires it.
- The most effective method of **information overload prevention** is to adopt an **active approach** and be able to decide what kind of information it is beneficial to follow.
- **The use of RSS channels** and an effective use of e-mail may help you manage information overload.
- **Spams** can be divided into several categories according to their characteristics - hoax, phishing or chain e-mails.

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