

## **THREE REMEDIES TO INFORMATION OVERLOAD** **The “Paperless Office” That Never Quite Arrived**

By Chris Perrow

In 1997 office workers around the world went through 150 million tons of paper, more than double the amount used in 1980. What happened to the Great Paperless Office that was heralded by the advent of the computerage?

In the US, between 1995 and 2000: paper consumption jumped 12%-computer use at work increased 5%. U.S. businesses spend more than \$25 billion a year filing, storing and retrieving paper. There is a real fear of knowing how to file documents properly, both electronically and physically. As a new technology arises, it often compounds the problem because people still don't have a systematic process. They also are more comfortable with touching paper. They want to put their hands on information. The lack of faith in electronic storage is actually safer than in physical format.

Of the three levels of paper flow management — company-wide, department-wide and personal— probably the most difficult but also the most valuable in terms of time and cost savings is a company-wide information management system.

Say you have eight people in your accounting department, each responsible for several key accounts. You want to uniformly capture information so you can easily retrieve it. That takes a well-thought, uniform data storage system that will enable the CFO, CEO or managers to equally access information efficiently. It might take only one cabinet of CD's to store that data instead of six storage units filled to the gills with boxes of files.

One company I worked with had 12 storage buildings. Through electronic document management, that number has now been decreased by half through document scanning and CD storage.

Effective company-wide data storage systems start with three basic steps:

Remedies to Information Overload:

1. Schedule time for an information make-over.  
Until you know what is crossing your desk (whether in paper or electronic format) you cannot determine what you need to keep, how you need to keep it and what actions are necessary.
  - a. Schedule an appointment with yourself in the morning and the afternoon to deal with your paper, e-mails, and voice mails. Write the appointment in your calendar. Your time is certainly as valuable as you co-workers time.
  - b. Batch work: Spend 10 minutes of focused time (No interruptions) on your in-box: what do I keep, what requires action, what can I trash. Do the same for e-mails, and voice mail. Multi-tasking interferes with sound decision-making so concentrate on one task at a time.
2. Set up a central location for maintaining reports and other resources.
  - a. Set up an office library: one copy of Board reports, insurance portfolios, etc.
  - b. Assign the position of Records Management. This position will save dollars, time and paper for your company. It is a vital component to a successful business yet is usually completely overlooked.
  - c. Set policies to control duplication. Resist duplicating information unless it is absolutely necessary. It is so easy to copy something and send it along, or forward e-mail...but is it necessary?
3. Purge your flow of information

- a. For one month track the information crossing your office threshold, both in electronic and paper format.
- b. At month's end, review the list. Determine what you can purge from your inbound: Cancel subscriptions; request to be removed from distribution lists.

**About Chris Perrow:**

Chris Perrow designs organizational systems that fit the nature of the individual, department or company, helping people perform at their peak while maintaining order and flow. As President of Perrow Systems in Silver Lake, Ohio, Chris conducts training for time management, lean office, productivity, change management, leadership, and employee development. Perrow is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO).

Chris holds a BA in psychology from Muhlenberg College. She has helped clients like Kent State University, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, Office Max and SummaCare. to achieve new productivity through new, lasting process training Contact Chris at Perrow Systems at 330-686-0282 or by e-mail at [info@perrowsystems.com](mailto:info@perrowsystems.com), or view her website at <http://www.perrowsystems.com>.