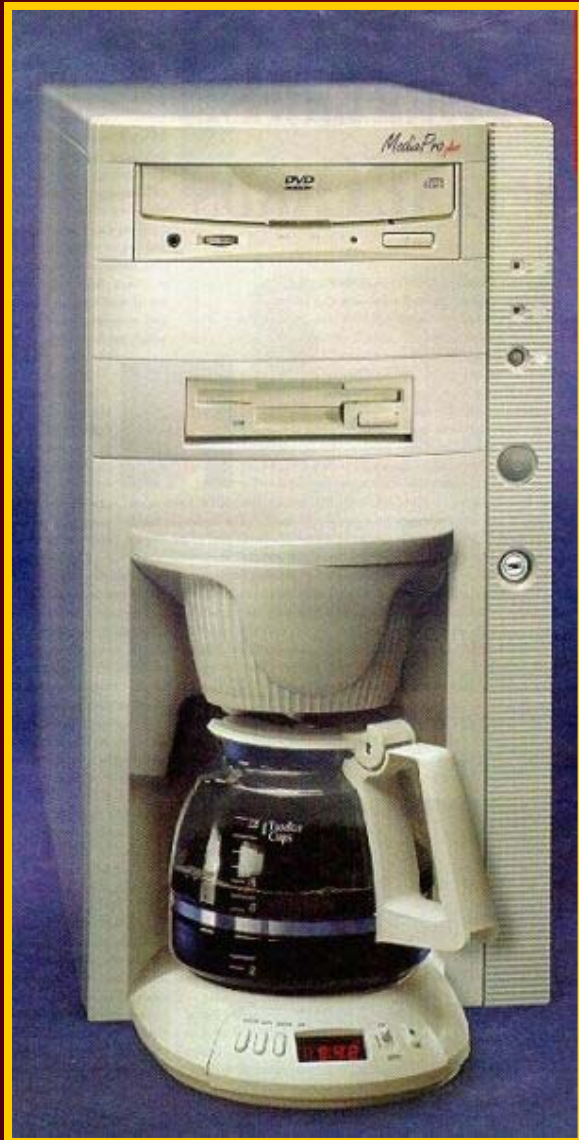




Mark Twain once said that "all you need in life is confidence; then success is sure." Although we are all big fans of 'Ole Sam', I think even he would probably rewrite that quote in the business world of the twenty-first century. I bet he'd probably insert the word 'knowledge' for 'ignorance'. No, it wouldn't be funny but it probably would be a lot more accurate. This month we explore the question, 'With all the information that's available, how on earth do I get just the information I need to be the best I can be at work?' We all need to be on top of our game and be aware of our world, our industry, and our neighborhood. Let's see what we can do about it...

HOW DO YOU FILTER YOUR INFORMATION?



Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it.

- Samuel Johnson

TO BE CONSCIOUS
THAT YOU ARE
IGNORANT IS A
GREAT STEP TO
KNOWLEDGE.

-Benjamin Disraeli

Recently, my partners and I were part of a large initiative to train and coach several hundred professionals in the use of some pretty sophisticated software. The challenge for these professionals was that they didn't have timely access to minute-by-minute information to help their clients. A disaster waiting to happen, you might say. This new software would fix all that.

Our job was to provide one-on-one training and coaching so that the professionals felt comfortable with the capabilities of the new software. As a result of this training, the good news was that they now had a tremendous amount of information at hand. The bad news was that this volume of information was overwhelming to them. The new challenge became how each employee could quickly access the exact information that they wanted to see, even if it wasn't necessarily what co-workers wanted to see. Fortunately, the software provided tools that gave each individual what he/she wanted. These tools were called filters.

The more I worked with these software filters, the more I thought about the concept of filters in my day-to-day life in business. What was I doing to filter the immeasurable barrage of information in order to do the best for the business, our clients, and my business partners? I quickly came to the conclusion that everyone of us is a product of the filters that we use in our business and personal lives.

Let me explain. In order to be as prepared in business, I regularly scan several forms of media to be on top of things or keep ahead of the curve. These media include newspapers, periodicals, books, radio and television programs, and various internet websites. This scanning helps me keep in touch with the various industries that we serve as well as cross reference anecdotes for some of our training programs.

The challenge for all of us is to use our filters to get the information we need in the most time efficient way. Here are a few tips to help you:

Firstly, take the time to determine what filters you have in place. If your current filters restrict all information coming to you except say the entertainment and the sports news, you are going to have a different outlook on your work world than someone whose filters include general business news, information specific to your industry and, say, environmental issues. Let me give you an example. I recently provided sales training to one of our clients. One of the Sales Agents in the session did not know who his province's Premier was. Whether or not that is a bad thing is for you to decide, but it did tell me a lot about this person's filters and interests.



Secondly, determine what information you need that you are not now receiving on a regular basis. I suggest you step back, talk to your work colleagues and leaders, and together establish what information would be of value to all of you on a daily or weekly basis. Perhaps you need to know more about your competition, local and world news items, or the technology that directly impacts your industry. This step is vital. Getting and knowing the right information quickly will make you look professional in your customers' eyes.

Lastly, find the sources of the information you need. I certainly wouldn't discount traditional sources such as the press, radio and television. After all, I use them all the time. But the internet, and especially technology called RSS that brings the information to you rather than you going looking for it, is an excellent efficient use of your time.

Maybe you don't need to know who your provincial or state politicians are, but you do need the ability to render down a world of information to enable you and your company to meet your customers' expanding needs.