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Do you suffer from New Economy Depression Syndrome?

By Dana Greenlee, Technology Columnist

Many of us living in today's fast-paced new economy find ourselves scanning hundreds of pages of information daily while enduring a constant flow of interruptions from cell phones, palms, pocket PC's, instant messaging and pagers.

Some of us even email the person in the cubicle next to us instead of walking five feet to ask a question. We're part of the "always-on" economy.

Tim Sanders knew this all too well when he worked as Yahoo's Chief Solutions Officer from 2001-2003. That's when he authored "Love is the Killer Ap" and coined such terms as Lovecat and NEDS. New study findings link heavy Internet usage, information overload, and social isolation to NEDS -- a sort of Carpel Tunnel of the Mind. Tim took a moment to talk about NEDS symptoms and cure.



DANA GREENLEE

DANA **GREENLEE**: What is up with this NEDS?

TIM SANDERS: NEDS is an acronym for New Economy Depression Syndrome. It's a mental state that is a result of a combination of information overload and frequent interruption, and resulting in an erosion of personal, close relationships. The symptoms are anxiety, fatigue, stress, and lower productivity and irritability in a team environment.

GREENLEE: The online piece of our business and personal life is only getting more substantial. What are you telling people who are involved in the online world about how to adapt?

SANDERS: What we've noticed is that the survey respondents who have strong personal relationships at work and in homes suffer less symptoms, despite being attacked by the same amount of information. The number one solution is resiliency through warm living. That means a certain amount of face-to-face contact, phone contact on long-term e-mail relationships, and living in the warm channels, contributing warm thoughts and ideas. Those create shock absorbers that can help you deal with this information. Personally, if I turned everything off, I wouldn't have been a very effective chief solutions officer at Yahoo. If I didn't check my e-mail, carry a Blackberry or pager, it would be very difficult for me to maintain execution focus. Unfortunately, I'm still pummeled every day by information. But I'm buffering with strong business relationships, strong warm-hearted thinking patterns. I'm creating tech-free zones throughout my day.

GREENLEE: You're suggesting more of a balance in how you use technology and live your everyday life.

SANDERS: I actually like to think of it is a high-tech diet. Think about it this way -- when the

health craze was going on, everybody was going to be physically fit. People said, "Don't take the elevator. Take the stairs." So I say, "Don't send an instant message 15 feet. Get up! Walk 15 feet. See someone's face." They'll transfer physiological energy to you face-to-face. It's just a different way of behaving. I think you have to be conscious about it. That's why there was a motto across my cubicle that said, "In a world of Inforuption, love is a killer app."

GREENLEE: Is dealing with technology a generational thing?

SANDERS: The older you are, the harder it is to withstand stress. The reason why is a concept I call "digital natives" versus "digital immigrants." My teenager has been online since he was 6. Over 80 percent of his life has been online. He's a native. That's his natural environment. In my forties, I don't think I've been online 20 percent of my life. As a result, that's all new to me. That's what stress is. Stress is literally something I cannot control or withstand -- it's new. Novelty creates stress. As a result, these business people that are in their forties and fifties -- this is so new to them. We are drinking out of a fire hose. It's amazing. You take a 50-year-old CEO -- in one year, not only does he now check e-mail, he is armed with a belt Blackberry pager and is available 24/7. His grandfather only worked 25 hours a week. Now the CEO is always on. It's very difficult to adjust to that and it leads to a lot of additional stress for the older working population.

GREENLEE: I've known some IT guys that work really hard but really cut themselves off from human interaction, turning from geeks and nerds to something worse.

SANDERS: It's a downward spiral. People begin to create walls. You start leaving voicemail messages that say, "Don't leave a message. E-mail me." They build a wall around themselves. They start replacing strong, yet vulnerable, relationships with online buddies. It's easy to delete something. It's difficult to have a real confrontation over instant message.

For information on NEDS and more conversation with Tim Sanders, the full audio interview is available at WebTalkGuys.com. More information about the author is at <http://www.TimSanders.com>.

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