

Swiss exhibition works to help information junkies

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File photo showing customers in an internet cafe. A new exhibition at the Museum of Communications in Bern, Switzerland is raising awareness about the amount of information individuals are bombarded with on a daily basis and its impact on mental health.

The Libyan war, the Greek debt crisis and the Dominique Strauss-Kahn scandal have all been rich fodder this year for news junkies -- but is today's information overload healthy?

A Swiss clinic has set out to help those who feel overwhelmed by such excess with an unusual exhibition that runs until July 15, 2012 at the Museum for Communication in Bern.

On arrival the visitor walks into a darkened room with 12,000 books lined up on shelves, in an illustration of the sheer amount of [information](#)

individuals are bombarded with on a daily basis.

The exhibition explains that if all the [inhabitants](#) of the Earth came together to process all the data released worldwide, they would each have to read about 12,000 books a day.

"In principle, communication is important and can be something that gives pleasure, but nowadays there is a flood of information," said museum director Jacqueline Strauss.

She likens it to food. "You can eat too much, you can always eat the same thing (...). That's not good, but if you have a healthy and balanced diet, that is pleasurable and comfortable."

An average person can read a 350-page book in a day if they have nothing else to do, according to experts from Bern University who participated in the exhibition.

But the volume of information and communications broadcast and published round the world by Internet, e-mail, telephone, the press, radio and television is estimated in the exhibition to amount to about 7.355 billion gigaoctets -- the equivalent of billions of books.



A Swiss clinic is hoping to help those suffering from information overload with its "Warning: Communicating harms" exhibition at the Museum of Communication in Bern, Switzerland. Visitors are invited to fill out a questionnaire that will enable the compilation of their 'Personal Communications Index' and lead to the offer of suitable treatment.

Faced with this surfeit of information, "there are cases where people become ill and there are certain risks, like [burnout](#)," said Strauss. But 'overload' illness can be avoided.

The Communications Clinic, which she has set up in the exhibition, is meant primarily to "raise awareness".

On a television, installed at the entrance to the clinic, a woman warns visitors: "Advertisements pile up in our letterboxes, spam chokes our e-mail boxes" and "cable companies offer us 200 channels".

"Are you stressed out, overwhelmed, exhausted?" she asks.

If the answer is "yes", the visitor is invited into a "check-up room" to fill out a questionnaire that will enable the compilation of their Personal Communications Index and lead to the offer of suitable treatment.

The visitor is then told by coaches which door they need to go through.

The green door is for those with no problem. The yellow door is for those who are only mildly troubled by the excess of information, and it opens on to a space where the visitor can get counselling on how to sort out their e-mails.

For the really "sick", there are two more intensive treatments. The red door opens into the meditation room, also described as "inner light". Comfortably seated on black cushions, the visitor is encouraged to relax, with a red light forcing them to close their eyes and a woman's voice urging them to let go.

The orange room, known as the "balanced formula", offers the visitor a walk in the wild, between wooden walls and on a floor of pebbles. Visitors can pick the pebbles up, collect them, write on them and listen to the sounds of a flowing stream and songbirds.

At the end of the tour, an automatic distributor delivers a 'medicine' called "Comucaine".

Packaged in a white box, Comucaine is an instruction leaflet which summarises the advice given during the exhibition to help people to de-stress from information overload.

For those who are really hooked on the news, the clinic offers online support on the Facebook page www.facebook.com/svanbelkom.

But above all, the museum's director emphasised, people should not

forget that "one is not only a victim, one is also guilty" because "everybody is a producer of information".

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