

July 20, 2015

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If You Want Better Business Solutions, Take More Vacations

Posted: 08/28/2014 12:40 pm EDT | Updated: 10/28/2014 5:59 am EDT



Millions of people will take breaks and vacations before the summer ends. The summer is a time for us to unplug, refresh and reset. For most of us, unplugging is something we think is impossible or something we feel guilty doing for longer than a few hours or days. Instead, many of us take false vacations -- half-baked vacations where we stay plugged in while taking time off. We feel compelled to check our investments, the latest news, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and email updates on the chance that we may miss something important.

Today, stress and information overload are a part of our everyday life. According to the website, [Digital Intelligence Today](#), information fatigue syndrome (IFS) occurs when the "volume of useful and relevant information available exceeds processing capacity and becomes a hindrance rather than a help."

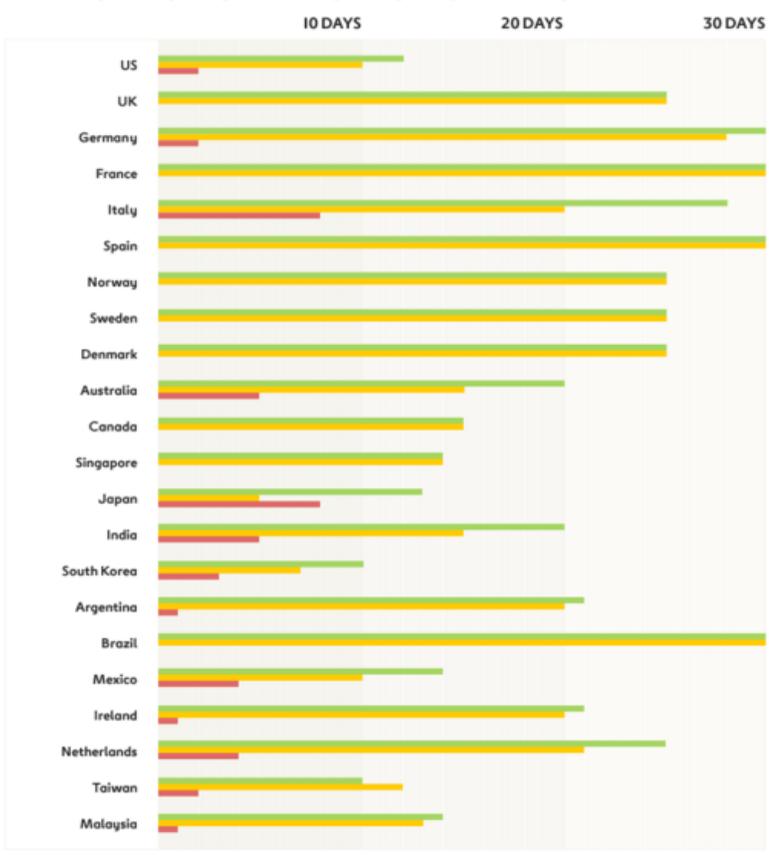
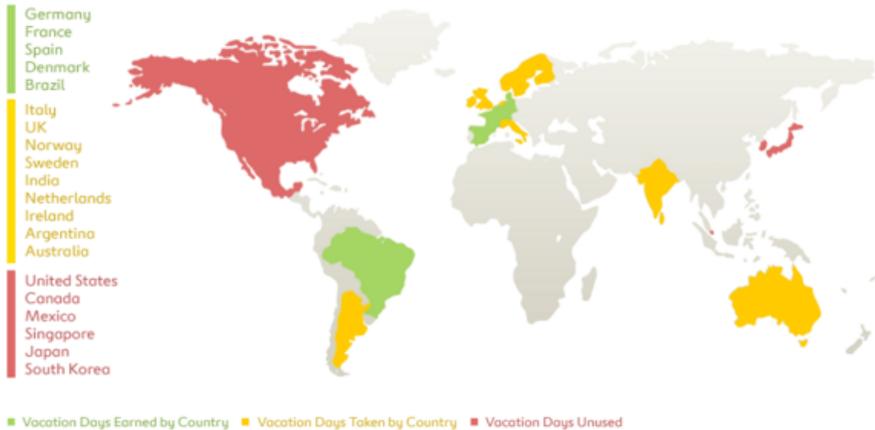
Information Overload Facts:

- 90% of all the data in the world has been generated over the last two years
- The average American consumes 34 gigabytes / 12 hours of information per day -- outside of work
- In the US, people who text send or receive an average of 35 texts per day
- 28 per cent of office workers time is spent dealing with emails
- The typical Internet user is exposed to 1,707 banner ads per month
- Information (over)load is linked to greater stress, and poorer health
- Overuse of social media can lead to short-term memory loss

Which countries are the most vacation deprived?

According to a survey in 2012 conducted by [Expedia](#) called the Vacation Deprivation Study, thousands of people were polled in 22 countries about their vacation habits.

On average, Americans earn the fewest vacations days at 12. Yet, they leave two of those days unused.



Does taking a vacation, break or a nap improve performance?

In a recent New York Times [article](#), Daniel J. Levitin explains that taking vacations, breaks and naps increases our problem-solving ability. The mind's processing capacity has a limit.

"Our brains have two dominant modes of attention: the task-positive network and the task-negative network (they're called networks because they comprise distributed networks of neurons, like electrical circuits within the brain). The task-positive network is active when you're actively engaged in a task, focused on it, and undistracted; neuroscientists have taken to calling it the central executive. The task-negative network is active when your mind is wandering; this is the daydreaming mode. These two attentional networks operate like a seesaw in the brain: when one is active and the other is not."

When was the last time you solved a hard problem? Did you take a break -- that is, go for a walk, go grocery shopping or take a shower? You were likely in daydreaming mode, which does not require sustained attention and focus. From nowhere, an insight or answer appeared that eluded you while in deep problem-solving mode.

Levitin is a director of the Laboratory for Music, Cognition and Expertise at McGill University and Vinod Menon is a professor of neuroscience at Stanford University. They describe a third component of the attention system, known as the attentional filter. The attentional filter helps us orient our attention and tell us what to pay attention to and what to ignore. The process of switching between task-positive (focused production) and task-negative (inspired daydreaming) activities gives us the ability to relax and find inspiration to a problem we have been thinking about for some time.

The researchers argue that to be more productive and creative, it is crucial to have defined project periods where we switch between these two modes. For example, engaging in email and social media networks should be completed in two separate blocks. When a person constantly monitors text messages or updates that range from stocks, Facebook or Twitter, it is almost impossible to have sustained attention on any one thing. Not surprisingly, frequent switching between tasks makes us tired and dizzy.

The researchers recommend reducing multitasking and focus instead on a single task for 30 to 50 minutes. Studies show that activities as simple as a walk or listening to music can trigger the daydreaming mode that supports creative insights. Vacations, breaks and naps as short as 10 minutes often improve our cognitive ability and decision making.

People working overtime without breaks often reach a point of diminishing returns. Air traffic controllers and other high-attention jobs usually require frequent breaks to maintain performance. The next time you are struggling to solve a problem, consider switching off. Take a nap or a break. Or go on vacation. More than likely, a valuable insight will appear when you least expect it.

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1 of 21 < >



How Sweet It Is



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