

# Why do we need Information?



“  
... just as money  
has no intrinsic  
value except its  
exchange value,  
data has no  
intrinsic value  
except its  
action value  
”

**W**e live in the Age of Information.

Fortunes are made merely because of the possession of information that only some have. And others want.

Suddenly 'database' is the magic word and data is what is driving the strategy of traditional Information Technology giants as well as Internet start-ups. Hundreds of companies on the Web give away valuable goods and services—free software, access to pornographic material, e-mail newsletters—solely in exchange for information about you.

Even in the most primitive of businesses, computers are being deployed to capture every bit of information that an enterprise encounters in its daily operations.

What do they do with it?

Perhaps the right question is 'What they *intend* to do with it?', for then the answer would be—Use it. Which is why, as part of an information churning organisation, the right question to ask ourselves is 'Why am I keeping this?' And the wrong answer is 'Because I can'.

In these times of twenty gigabyte hard-disks and six e-mail accounts, we are faced with information overload, and in the complexity of managing it, we can easily forget why we began retaining it in the first place.

The only real advantage of computers is their stunning capacity to process data. Computers can capture it, crunch it, compress it, store it, retrieve it, analyse it... everything except act upon it.

And acting upon information is left to us.

For this Information driven generation, data is the new currency. And just as money—our currency of commercial transaction—has no intrinsic value except its exchange value, data has no intrinsic value except its action value.

And while we are evaluating the use of data, we should at the very least stop its abuse. How many times have we sent off a banal retort or a pointless update just because it is easy to hit the 'Return' button on our email program?

Perhaps the convenience of technology aids its abuse. Would we keep ten-year-old receipts for everything that we have bought in life just because we had five extra cupboards? Or start sending inane letters to all our friends if we happen to have tons of spare notepaper?

So why do we not apply the same simple rules of selection and rejection to digitised data? Maybe because most of us have failed to make the fundamental distinction—Information is not Knowledge, and Knowledge is not Action. And Action should be the only meaningful purpose of all Information.

It's time to think—'Why do we need Information?'

*Gouar Jassal*

Executive Editor