Using the leverage of technology to get more done

by Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

With the explosion of technology and 'tools' I felt I needed to share a few thoughts on how we can use some of these to get more done and enjoy our lives. I am by no means an expert on this specific area, but I am using some of these 'tools' and seeing some definitive increase in my personal productivity. I offer these thoughts for your consideration and application. I challenge you to investigate their value for your situation in freeing up time or leveraging time for increased productivity.

- **Cell phones –** can be a productivity tool or a major waste of time depending on how you use them. Using your dead time to return calls or keep in touch with the office, your family or clients can be a great use of your time. Using it to allow clients to get back to you when you need to hear from them or in cases of crisis is great too. I quite frequently use mine when I am sitting in an airport to call back clients and have actually completed deals on the tarmac. It also allows me to move my 'office' to a nearby coffee house for a change of scenery and pace.

  Nevertheless, allowing them to disturb you or other dinners, or theatergoers is an abuse of this 'tool.' With the advent of additional technology look for these 'tools' to become even more interactive with additional Internet connections and applications and even voice activated dictation and instantaneous translation into other languages.

- **Faxes –** have become commonplace in our work world an they have gained acceptance for communication of ideas and lately even legal transactions which can save you quite a lot of time. When I purchased my place in the northern country of Alberta the whole transaction was done via fax and bank transfer of funds via computer. Not at all like the first house, I bought. Use faxes to share information, ask for confirmation and to look at documents, to cut down on communication and lead times.

- **CD-ROM and tape decks –** with so many of us traveling and commuting on a daily basis using our time wisely here can be a benefit to our ongoing professional development or inspiration. A daily commute of 30 minutes one way is not unusual for many of us. This same 30 minutes can be better used listening to a CD-ROM or cassette tape of a favorite speaker or educator. Many of my fellow CAPS/NSA speakers have some wonderful tapes and CD-ROMs. I quite often pop one in when I am driving. With a personal Walkman or digital player, these experts can be taken with you on the road or the airways. I travel a fair amount to deliver my programs to clients across North America. Sitting in airports used to be a waste of time. I have had some good response from my audio and CD offerings.

- **Computers –** have become a valuable tool for increased productivity with the ability to store, combine and deliver information across the world in seconds.

I am now able to send contracts, biographical information and even learning guides as attachments to my clients, which saves time, money and most of all the hassle of printing, compiling and mailing. Use of templates has allowed me to systemize my speaking and consulting business so I am able to spend more time on the important activities and with the people I value the most. In fact most of what I need to transact my dealings with clients is on the desktop at home, the laptop I travel with, and on my website, so I can make it easy for clients to say yes to engaging me.

- A fellow speaker from northern California suggested I spent only 12 minutes a day playing with my computer and the various software programs to learn what the various programs can do and what the various helps, short cuts, macro's etc do. Also, **taking the time to learn new programs will allow you to better use your investment in technology**. We do not need the latest tool or update, but we do need to fully utilize what we have.

- How about **programming your computer** to pick news, or articles of interest in your particular field of study for you? This can make your time more productive. Moreover, if you do it with an audio system, it can be downloaded onto an MP3 system and listened to enroute.

- **Automating –** to save keystrokes and the use of your mouse is a major help if you use the computer a fare amount. Use of macro's can reduce a name, full sentence, etc to a couple of keystrokes and save time and reduce the chance of misspelling something you frequently type. Use of an auto-correct will help if you commonly miss-type certain words. Learn how to use the assistants and wizards in your creative endeavors.

- **A Computer back up system –** is an essential time management tool. It is not if you will loose data, but when, as I have learned lately with the worm virus that infected my laptop. Backing up on a regular basis is a good investment of your time in managing your data, client information or in my instance my creative efforts. In addition, do not leave your back up disks beside the computer. If a disaster hits it might wipe out your whole office.

- **Personal information managers (PIM) –** are the software programs that help you be more effective in your digital life. They can be programmed to find people by name, and act as prompts for appointments, deadlines and commitments. They allow you to network with other users, and share information via beaming or infrared transfer. They allow you to synchronize between your PDA and your home or office computer and even do so from remote locations to download or transfer data and information. They call allow you to share information with a larger group for collaboration too. If you have a program like Pay-Pal you can even pay bills and transfer money to other users.

- **Personal digital assistant –** Palm Pilots, visors etc allow you to use the PMI's and allow you to carry a mini-computerized assistant with you.

With so many on the market, I would suggest you do some investigation on the one that works for your situation. Ask other users of the ones you are evaluating how valuable they found it, and would they buy another one?

- **Contact management systems –** have become more acceptable in our business environment with many companies using them to track data, client information and schedule contacts and follow-ups. Again, investigate the various ones and see which one makes sense for your situation. Check out their adaptability. Can they grow with you?

- **Dictation software –** allows you to record digitally and then synchronize with your computer for a transcription. You can also dictate directly to your computer. The downside is they are still slower than normal speech, only 85-90% accurate and require time to train…kind of like a puppy. Nevertheless, they can be very useful as well. I am working with mine and hope to be able to use it to offer transcripts of my training sessions and talks to my clients, and to capture thoughts and creative insights during those sessions.

- **Digital recorders and cameras –** are becoming more available and certainly less expensive. Digital recorders are so clear and crisp; that it sounds like it was done in a studio. In addition, it can be edited and cleaned up if something happened during the session. Digital cameras have gained acceptance, primarily for e-bay use. They can however, be an effective communication tool in being able to capture an image digitally and send it across the world in a matter of seconds. A picture is worth a thousand words, is now digitally even more so!

- **Internet storage -** is still in its infancy and privacy is in the minds of the potential users. However, it is gaining acceptance as an effective way to back up or store data and information that can be easily accessed by several people. Look for this to be an effective way of doing catalogues, training manuals, technical manuals, and even e-books.

- **Internet based meetings –** either as audio or video are helping companies increase productivity and allow for interaction over distances. They allow people in various locations to be able to interact and share ideas and feedback. Our national CAPS board meets on line on a monthly basis to discuss issues and make decisions. Our directors live across Canada and some times call in while on the road.

- **Internet based training –** is starting to gain acceptance for cost and time savings. Like Tele-seminars, it allows people in various locations to be in contact and learn from one another. It saves on travel and accommodations as well as time away from work and home. It will not replace the need to bring people together for training or conferences, but it is a nice augment to that for follow-up and reinforcement.

- **Customer service and promotion via Internet –** can be a great tool, allowing customers to share concerns and feedback with you and each other. Using Frequently Asked Questions and help tips cuts down on service work and time delays to assist clients in their concerns.

- **A PDF file –** can be a creative time saver. Adobe reader is now shipped with Netscape and Microsoft products allowing people to view full color documents on their computer screen. This frees you up to be able to keep your information crisp and current. I am in the process of converting my masters, contracts, speaker information to PDF format. This will allow me to service my clients while on the road and drastically reduce the time needed to share information or get masters to them for their use for one of my programs. My printer can now send me full color proofs of book covers, business cards, post cards and I can send back my corrections or approvals on the road. I spend part of my time in Northern Alberta in the middle of nowhere, and my printer is located in Burnaby, BC. This has been a great boon for us both.

These are just a few thoughts on leveraging technology to help you get more done. As I said, it is not meant to be a definitive piece of work. I share it with you simply to point out that there are tools and techniques available to help you get control of your life, inject some clarity into your work world and free up time for the people and activities you love.

I would love to hear your thoughts and success stories and will include them in future versions. Drop me a line at: bob@ideaman.net

About the author:

Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey is a sought after productivity strategist, creativity catalyst and idea farmer (http://www.ideafarmer.biz), who regularly writes for North American consumer, association and trade journals, on-line magazines and company intranets. He is the author of nine books, a mini-book series, four success systems and an e-book series. Bob is a motivational, business and association keynote conference speaker and executive leadership trainer and coach (http://www.leadersedge.biz). He is a professional member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and the International Federation for Professional Speakers.

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