

The Cost of Not  
Paying Attention:  
How Interruptions  
Impact Knowledge  
Worker Productivity

Executive Summary

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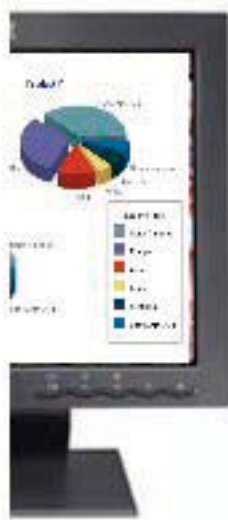
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new challenge awaits companies in the knowledge economy: the tools which serve as a lubricant and keep knowledge flowing, such as e-mail, the Web, and instant messaging, interrupt knowledge work as well and cause significant downtime.

The cost: \$588 billion per annum in the United States alone.

In looking at interruptions, it is important to determine whether something is important, urgent, or both. Many knowledge workers simply do not differentiate, or see everything as both important and urgent. Importance can also vary, based on the needs of the group or organization.

### TYPES OF INTERRUPTIONS

Interruptive events can be divided into several categories.

- Total interruptions.
- Dominant interruptions.
- Distractions.
- Background activities.

In addition to the above, interruptions may be divided into passive and active interruptions.

Active interruptions are initiated by the very person who chooses to be interrupted by them. Passive interruptions come from others, and arrive via e-mail, the phone, the Web, a pager, a mobile phone, and instant messaging, just to name a few.

Modern technology has increased the variety of ways and the ease by which a knowledge worker can interrupt, or be interrupted.

Compounding this, the manner in which people work has changed dramatically, and all indications are that more change is in the air. For example, e-mail has become a staple of communication both internally as well as externally. But compared to five or ten years ago, how many e-mail messages does one receive today?

An additional issue occasioned by the knowledge economy is that the line between work and one's personal life tends to blur. The trend began slowly, as knowledge workers were enabled to check voicemail and, later on, e-mail, from home and on the road. Today, many people feel that they are at work 24x7.

On the other side of the equation, as mentioned throughout this report, it is typical for workers to read their personal e-mail, make personal phone calls, and even surf the Web recreationally from their offices. The job will fall to companies to ensure that the lines between work and home do not become too blurred.

Work must go on, despite interruptions. Using the right tool, instant messaging v. e-mail v. the telephone, will minimize the impact of interruptions in many cases.

Still, knowledge workers can be their own worst enemy. The majority of knowledge workers tend to open a new e-mail immediately upon notification.

## ABOUT BASEX

Basex is the recognized expert in Collaborative Business Environments, the intersection of content, knowledge and collaboration within the enterprise and beyond, and the authority on the productivity of knowledge workers and how information technology affects them. Basex created the Knowledge Worker Impact Quotient™ (KWIQ™) to answer the needs of IT buyers for a better understanding of the impact tools and technologies have on both the workplace and on the people who use them. The company has been cited by KMWorld as one of the “100 Companies that Matter in Knowledge Management”.

Basex has a 22-year track record of accurate research and visionary analysis that drives its clients to make the right business and technology decisions for their organizations.



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