



November 2011

Dear Producer/Interviewer:

Running a Google search on the term “abundance” produces more than 40,500,000 results in approximately 0.27 seconds. In a traditional library, it might take double the time just to open the cover of a book that may or may not contain information relevant to your search. In the height of information overload, abundance is inevitable. Yet it is manageable if we accept that the Internet medium has transformed our system of knowing into an endless network of ideas. “In this world of abundance, knowledge is not a library but a playlist tuned to our present interests,” writes Internet and expert network researcher David Weinberger. “It is not eternally truthful content but subject matter good enough for our current task. It is not a realm but a path that gets us where we’re going.”

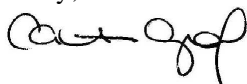
In **TOO BIG TO KNOW: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren’t the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room** (Basic Books; January 3, 2012), Weinberger explains how we used to know and why remaining confined to the limits of earlier knowledge structures would be counterproductive to the progressive goals of modern day society. He explores the alternatives presented by the networking of knowledge, and explains the benefits of embracing collaborative differences. “Knowledge,” Weinberger writes, “now lives in the messy web that has grown around it, the way life lives not in our neurons, bones, blood and marrow but in their connection.”

In an interview, Weinberger can discuss the evolution of complex knowledge systems. Drawing on anecdotal examples from history, politics, business, philosophy, science and culture, he can also discuss:

- **The Origin of Facts:** The recent history of facts has occurred in three phases: the Age of Classic Facts in Darwin’s time, the Age of Data-based Facts in the 1950s and the Age of the Net in today’s web of links. Factual meaning was originally defined as the opposite of theory, and later as a set of widely accepted truths.
- **Filtering Forward:** Properties of the network allow users to benefit from knowing-by-including, rather than knowing-by-reducing. An underlying analysis of metadata and contextual cues in the cloud of data prove that filters no longer hide content, but reveal it. In fact, they *are* content. Stopping points exist only at the user’s discretion.
- **A Network of Experts:** Who and how should we trust in the marketplace of ideas? Today, few people are full-time professional experts. Crowdsourcing and collaborative editing are often accepted as alternatives to traditional expertise, with validation from linked data that reinforces claims and provides food for thought.
- **Scientific Success:** Networked science is learning to operate and prosper within a world of difference. Allowing research to become a continuous open process has made it harder to determine where credit is due, but has provided opportunities for innovation and faster progress.
- **The Room:** The smartest person in the room is the room, where the room is a network of people and ideas, and the network is more valuable than the sum of its parts. Diversity in groups can provide new perspectives and heuristics, counter the disadvantages of echo chambers, and enhance distributed leadership and decision making.

I’ve enclosed a copy of **TOO BIG TO KNOW** for interview and review consideration, and I will be in touch soon. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at the number/e-mail below.

Sincerely,



• Caitlin Graf, Publicist • 212-340-8162 • caitlin.graf@perseusbooks.com

**Pub Date: January 3, 2012****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Contact: Caitlin Graf  
212-340-8162 • [caitlin.graf@perseusbooks.com](mailto:caitlin.graf@perseusbooks.com)

“*Too Big to Know* is a refreshing antidote to the doomsday literature of information overload. Acknowledging the important roles that smart mobs and wise crowds have played, David Weinberger focuses on solutions to the crisis in knowledge—translating information into new knowledge by exploiting the network.” —David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States

“*Too Big to Know* is a stunning and profound book on how our concept of knowledge is changing in the age of the Net. It honors the traditional social practices of knowing, where genres stay fixed, and provides a graceful way of understanding new strategies for knowing in today’s rapidly evolving, networked world.” —John Seely Brown, co-author of *The Social Life of Information* and *A New Culture of Learning*

# **TOO BIG TO KNOW**

**RETHINKING KNOWLEDGE NOW THAT THE FACTS AREN'T  
THE FACTS, EXPERTS ARE EVERYWHERE, AND THE SMARTEST  
PERSON IN THE ROOM IS THE ROOM**

**By David Weinberger**

There was once a time when knowledge was straightforward, information was contained, experts were the elite and facts were agreed upon. Everything we needed to know—or so we thought—was managed by the dominant paper medium and bound between covers. But as the availability and application of today’s Internet resources grow at an exponential rate, more information exists now than ever before. In order to navigate through the information overload and manage the knowledge crisis at hand, wisdom seekers must embrace a new system of knowledge—a growing and changing network of ideas, one with no beginning and no end.

Today’s society is defined by a sense of urgency for progress, calling on creative knowledge and innovation to develop solutions for complex real-world problems. In **TOO BIG TO KNOW: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren’t the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room** (Basic Books; January 3, 2012), David Weinberger, a leader in Internet, social media and expert network research, reminds readers that, while knowing *everything* is beyond the limits of human capacity, there is potential for improving the quality of *what* we know and *how* we know. In the Age of the Net, Weinberger encourages knowing-by-including, rather than knowing-by-reducing, through the new defaults of linked data, filtering forward, and collaborative thinking. And he emphasizes that, where no last word exists, what holds value is the first word and the continuous exchange thereafter.

“Our new knowledge does not consist of a careful set of works that have passed through a series of narrow gates,” writes Weinberger. “We thought that knowledge was scarce, when in fact it was just that our shelves were small. Our new knowledge is not even a set of works. It is an infrastructure of connection. We now travel through abundance as knowingly as we can, which is to say always within a context of and from a standpoint, always with others, always with the amount of care we judge is required, always fallibly. Knowledge has become a network with the characteristics—for better and for worse—of the Net.”

Stepping beyond the boundaries of traditional knowledge systems composed of data-information-knowledge-wisdom hierarchies, Weinberger questions whether the network has succeeded in making us smarter, or has led to even more disarray in our thought processes. He traces the history of thought from the printed pages of Charles Darwin’s long-form revolutionary work in *On the Origin of Species*, to the public thinking of Jay Rosen’s blog posts on journalism in webby long-form, to the open access editing of Wikipedia entries outlining the Virginia Tech massacre. What’s different between now and then, Weinberger writes, is that facts are now found in metadata and the context of interaction; that expertise is defined not only by credentials, but also by experience; that the best decisions are born from the kind of discussion, debate and disagreement made possible only by a network of amateurs and professionals; and that authority is validated by links to sources that show us where we’ve been and where we’re headed.

In the aftermath of the great unnauling and the insistence on government transparency, Weinberger paints a vivid picture of what the network has to offer: a cloud of data in which there is open access and the platform for anyone to be a publisher, a critic or an editor. It is up to users, he writes, to determine what to do with this information and the tools to unlock it. Only these decisions and time will tell what effect the network will truly have on a world too complex for reduction into a single body of truth. But, as Weinberger proves by drawing on examples from history, philosophy, popular news and personal experience, networked knowledge has already changed the institutions of politics, business, science and culture. Ideas are coming from all corners of society, both within and outside organizations.

A glimpse into the world of information around us, **TOO BIG TO KNOW** provides a humbling account of the complexity of thought, the endless opportunities offered by the network system building on what is already known, and the price paid for limiting knowledge to the one-way conversations and spatial constraints of the paper medium. Although written as book itself, Weinberg’s analysis sends readers on a journey stretching far beyond its page count, and encourages them to explore long after closing the back cover.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

**David Weinberger** is a Senior Researcher at Harvard University’s Berkman Center for the Internet and Society and a member of its Fellowship Advisory Board. He was recently appointed to a prestigious Franklin Fellowship, working with the State Department on creating networks of experts using social media. He is the author of *Small Pieces Loosely Joined*, *Everything is Miscellaneous*, and a co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*. His writing has also appeared in *Wired*, *Smithsonian*, *The Guardian*, *USA Today*, *TV Guide*, *NY Times*, *Information Week*, and *The Boston Globe*. He lives in Brookline, Massachusetts.

#### **ABOUT THE BOOK:**

##### **TOO BIG TO KNOW:**

**Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren’t the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room**

**By David Weinberger**

**Published by Basic Books**

**Publication date: January 3, 2012**

**ISBN: 978-0-465-02142-0 • \$27.50 (US) / \$32.00 (CAN) • Hardcover • 256 pages**

*For additional information about **TOO BIG TO KNOW** and other Basic Books, visit us online at [www.basicbooks.com](http://www.basicbooks.com) or follow us on Twitter at @BasicBooks.*

# EXAMPLES OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD

## *from David Weinberger's TOO BIG TO KNOW*

Basic Books; January 3, 2012

---

- Google lists over 3 million hits on the phrase “information overload.”
- Technorati.com in 2009 tracked over 133 million blogs. Of those, more than 9,600 were *abandoned* every day.
- In 2008, Americans consumed about 3.6 sextillion bytes (or 3.6 zettabytes) of information. A sextillion is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 ( $10^{21}$  bytes), or a billion gigabytes times a thousand. A zettabyte is the equivalent of  $5 \times 10^{14}$  copies of *War and Peace*. They’d stack up to over 47 billion miles, or the length of eight trips from the Sun to Pluto and back.
- In the United States, 275,232 books were published in 2008, a thirty-fold increase in volume from 1900.
- When Data.gov—a site where executive-branch agencies were required to post all their nonsecret data so the public can access it—first launched, it had only 47 datasets. Nine months later, there were 168,000, and there had been 64 million hits on the site.
- In 1970, there were about two dozen think tanks. Today, there are over 3,500 worldwide, with about half of them in the United States. Our government has now relied on think tanks and their experts for a hundred years.
- In its initial survey, completed in 2008 after eight years of work, The Sloan Digital Sky Survey published information about 230 million celestial objects, including 930,000 galaxies; each galaxy contains millions of stars, so this brickyard may grow to a size where we have trouble understanding the number.
- The Library of Congress has tens of millions of items in storage because physics makes it hard to display and preserve, much less to share, physical objects. The Internet makes it far easier to share what’s in our digital basements.
- John Wiltbanks, vice president for Science at Creative Commons, notes that “[i]t used to take a year to map a gene. Now you can do thirty thousand on your desktop computer in a day.”
- Within days of the first human being diagnosed with the H1N1 “swine flu” virus, the H1 sequence of 1,699 bases had been analyzed and submitted to a global repository.
- Mendeley, a software application becoming increasingly popular among scientists that provides a way of measuring impact, was launched in January 2008. Twenty months later, it had 450,000 registered users and 33 million articles.
- Only about 2 percent of the Harvard University library system’s physical holdings circulate every year, and most of those are the same works that circulated the previous year.
- The Google book-scanning project alone has over 15 million scanned books, which you can search through more easily than you can look up an item in the index of the book on your night table.

All press materials presented here are the original work of Keri Ann Flacomio, with excerpts, quotations, information and fast facts retrieved from David Weinberger's **TOO BIG TO KNOW: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren't the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room.**