No, this isn’t a quote from the great Yogi Berra. And I’m not being philosophical in posing this question. It’s a genuine question, drawing awareness once again to our dismal situation with respect to handling the information that we’re bombarded with constantly.

Taking it all in
We have a lot of information.

As the now-famous analogy goes, it’s a sea of information, one that will drown us unless we learn to swim in it. (The actual quote is in the “Conclusion” section of the following Web site: http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info/summary.html.) Sources of information are plentiful and diverse in nature, compared to only a decade ago. On top of the traditional communication media, we now accumulate information through the Internet, email, and electronic imaging devices, just to name a few.

Chances are that you might want to recall some nuggets buried as bits and pieces within the digital objects you have. Currently, that would be one tedious job. Why? Because your computer doesn’t know much about your digital objects’ content.

What does your computer know?
As an example, think about receiving an invitation to an event, say a luncheon to honor someone you know (Jane Doe). There would normally be a large amount of information regarding this, each trapped in its own severely constrained environment and not correlated at all. For example, there might be an entry in your weekly planner about this event, indicating the name of the event (and possibly Jane’s name), the venue, and obviously the date and time.

In an ideal situation, this information, parsed into a fine level of granularity, would correlate with the pieces appearing within it: including the emails you exchanged regarding the invitation, the corresponding RSVP, your address book, the contact list, and the contents of various other repositories. Unfortunately, different applications that manage your life information often don’t work with the planner.

For the same reason, when you take pictures at an event, they probably won’t automatically be organized and classified as related to Jane. This holds true for other information available in various media formats. The gap is so great between our physical memory (the brain) and the computer as our extended memory.

With the general awareness of this badly needed capability, many leading companies are bringing about the necessary infrastructure piece by piece. For example, Microsoft’s new file system WinFS—which generates XML data by any application to be used—might take us one step closer. Google’s new G-mail—with its large storage space and better word correlation—brings email closer to meeting the needs of mainstream personal and business data. Apple’s iLife (audio and video editing software) is yet another effort. With these tools and other new products, paving the way to permanent repositories of a person’s personal information might be more plausible.

Getting to know you
Although I’ve spent this time discussing how we’re constantly bombarded with information, we at IEEE MultiMedia would still like to hear some valuable input from our readers. What information would you like to hear more about? What are your ideas for taming or better managing the masses of information each of us are faced with each day? We’d like to see a dialogue forming and feature it in our “Readers’ Remarks” column. Your comments and ideas on this topic, or anything else related to the topic of multimedia, would be welcome.

Readers may contact Editor-in-Chief Forouzan Golshani at golshani@cs.wright.edu.