News, Resources, and Useful Information for the Online Investigative and OSINT Professional from Toddington International Inc.

# Toddington International Inc.

## Online Research and Intelligence Newsletter

**MARCH 2020 EDITION**

## In This Edition

- Welcome to the Newsletter
- Travel Restricted? "Using the Internet as an Investigative Research Tool™"
- More Online Training
- Featured Article: "The Things That Make Decisions Difficult: FOBO, Bounded Rationality, and Loss Aversion"
- Upcoming Select Public Courses
- Tools and Resources for the OSINT Professional
- How-To's and Articles of Interest for the OSINT Professional

## Welcome to the Newsletter

**A Possible Pandemic and a Certain Infodemic**

As the world comes to terms with the public health and economic threat posed by SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19, governments, organizations, and the general public are aggressively searching for knowledge in order to assess the risk and make decisions on the best course of action.  In an effort to get the necessary information, the vast majority are turning to any number of online sources.

Internet sources of news are immediate and they are abundant; they are also biased to varying degrees and depending on the source, possible carriers of misinformation and

how we process what we find.

In the quest for timely and trustworthy information about the emerging health crisis, an additional challenge, the "Infodemic", or as it is defined by the New Oxford English Dictionary, "a surfeit of information about a problem that is viewed as being a detriment to its solution", is also emerging.

At TII, we believe that now more than ever, effective OSINT and Critical Thinking skills are absolutely essential, not just for identifying threats and assessing risks such as the ones we are now facing, but also for making the best possible decisions under often difficult circumstances.

To this end, we have been developing essential Critical Thinking curricula for all of our training programs over this past three years. We are focusing not just on *how* to effectively find information online, but also how to properly *think* about what we are doing, how we are doing it, and what we are seeing as a result.

With regard to the emerging global health crisis, we have been providing relevant OSINT-powered "information triage" services to select clients so as to empower them to mitigate risk and make better decisions in uncertain times.

We have also been taking proactive measures to ensure the safe delivery of our training programs both remotely and in person, with Standard Operating Procedures now in place to ensure the safety of class attendees and our staff.

Further, and supported by our existing computer based training platforms and programs, we have been increasing the live delivery of our training curricula through various teleconferencing mechanisms to significant success.

In this newsletter, we continue with our series of Critical Thinking articles and delve into the issues around some of the factors that can psychologically limit us when processing information, drawing conclusions, and making decisions.

As always, we appreciate your feedback and invite you to contact us anytime at contact@toddington.com.

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## E-Learning Graduates

Congratulations to the following students who are among those who successfully completed an e-learning program with TII this month:

- Luke Messitt

- Michael Thomas
- Samantha Martin
- Nicholas McInnes
- Chantal Osborne
- Nick Tucker
- Jamie Nicholls
- William Walsh
- Toni Baker
- Abigail Weir
- Brenda McVay
- Daniel Horton
- Thomas Powell
- Kayleigh Duncan
- Nino Rossi
- Leonard Wilkinson

*Important Note: As we respect the privacy of our students, we only publish the names of students who have provided express permission to do so.  Many of our students are unable to share their completion due to the nature of their employment, or due to online privacy concerns.  If your name did not appear in the above list and you wish to announce your completion of the course with TII, please* contact us.

## Travel Restricted?  We Have Your Online Training Options

### Take Your Online Research and Intelligence Skills to New Levels with TII's Comprehensive E-Learning Program, "Using the Internet as an Investigative Research Tool™"

The most comprehensive and up-to-date internet research and investigation e-learning program available, "Using the Internet as an Investigative Research Tool™" is designed to enable investigators, researchers, and intelligence professionals to find better online information, in less time, at less cost, with less risk™.

For a fraction of the cost of classroom-based training, our flexible and interactive virtual classroom environment allows candidates to progress at their own pace and competency level, with a qualified personal instructor on hand at all times to ensure success.  Initially launched in 1998, this highly-acclaimed and continually updated online course has been

Enrolment takes only a few moments; online credit card payments are accepted, and group discounts and licensing options are available for five or more registrants.  Visit the course page to find out more and instantly register, or contact us directly with any questions.

**Bonus: Tuition fee includes special access to select OSINT resources.**

*As a HRSDC certified educational institution, TII provides Canadian students with a T2202A Tuition Tax Receipt.*

## More Online Training

### Introduction to Intelligence Analysis
**40-Hour E-Learning Program**

This program provides a rich and interesting opportunity to explore the key concepts and intellectual foundations which inform intelligence analysis activity. Students will develop awareness of, and gain experience in, using common tools and methodologies to conduct analysis assignments, as well as learn how to fashion one's insights and ideas in a way that communicates effectively to clients and other intelligence consumers.  **Sign up or learn more** here**.**

### Criminal Intelligence Analysis
**40-Hour E-Learning Program**

This program is designed to equip aspiring and inexperienced analysts, as well as other interested law enforcement and investigative professionals, with the knowledge and skills required to undertake criminal intelligence analysis work, and to understand criminal intelligence analysis products when encountered.  **Sign up or learn more** here**.**

### Strategic Intelligence Analysis
**40-Hour E-Learning Program**

so.   Students will be equipped with the skills and knowledge required to effectively conceive, plan, and implement strategic analysis projects, and deliver impactful strategic advice to clients and other end users.  **Sign up or learn more** here**.**

## The Things That Make Decisions Difficult: FOBO, Bounded Rationality, and Loss Aversion
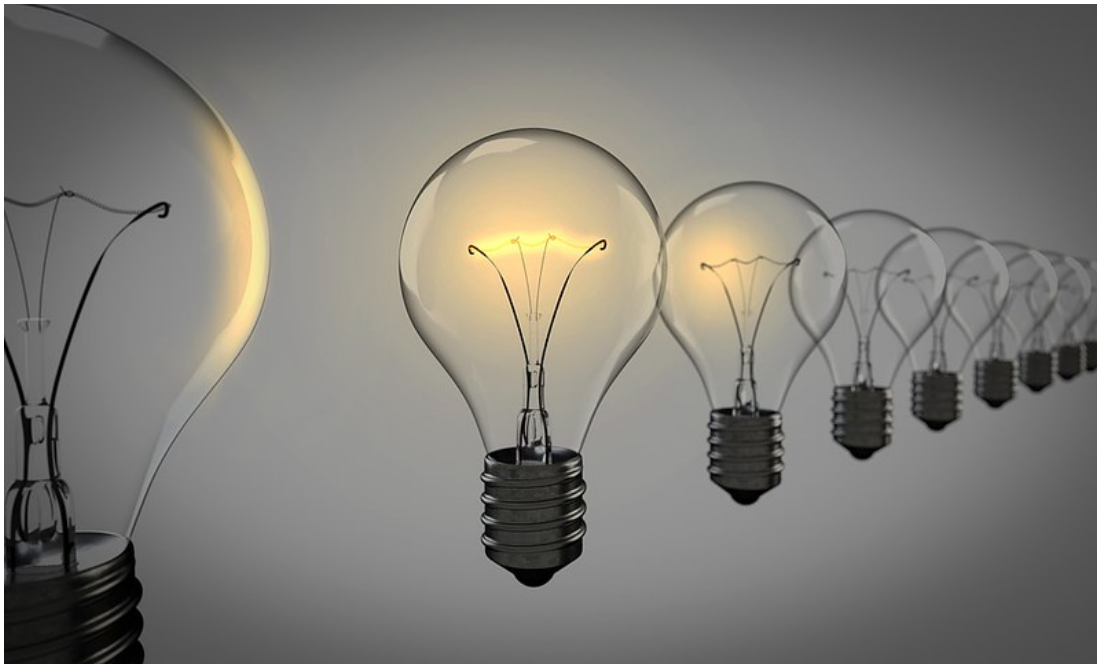


Image credit: Modup.net & Flickr

*As part of our commitment to the development of essential critical-thinking skills in today's information-driven society, we continue with our series of articles on effective thought processes.  In this edition, we explore some of the factors that impact our decision-making abilities.*

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**"If the practitioner knows his own mind clearly, he will obtain results with little or no effort.  But if he does not know anything about his own mind, all his efforts will be wasted".**

**- Thuong Chieu, Zen Master during the Ly Dynasty (1009 - 1225 AD)**

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**How many times have you found yourself** on your device or in front of your television, with your favourite streaming service launched, endlessly browsing through hundreds of

The more you browse, the worse the problem becomes. An increasing amount of time passes by, and when you eventually do decide on a program, you find yourself wondering if there was something else you could have been watching that would have been *better.* The end result: you've wasted a significant amount of time in making your choice and the ultimate enjoyment of your selection is often, and ultimately, diminished.

Living in today's "Attention Based Economy", where competing interests pushed through our devices see us frequently overloaded with options, we often feel so overwhelmed that we are frequently unsure about exactly what decision we should make.

And this problem goes far beyond deciding what we should watch on Netflix, or what car we should purchase, or how we should invest our savings, or how we should vote in the next election or referendum…

As professionals who are tasked with locating, evaluating, collating, and accurately analyzing vast amounts of often conflicting data, and then making (or recommending) an important decision around our findings, we often find ourselves falling into the trap of "analysis paralysis".

How can we break down our decision-making tasks into processes that are less stressful and ultimately more effective? Understanding the key biases we humans naturally have to differing degrees, and some of the common cognitive distortions we are all susceptible to, we are at a good starting place for making better decisions.

Here are just a few things to consider:

**Fear Of a Better Option ("FOBO")** is a social phenomenon coined by US venture capitalist Patrick McGinnis (the same person who also gave us the term FOMO or "Fear Of Missing Out"). FOBO can cause indecision, especially when all options are acceptable and the decision itself should be a simple one. FOBO prevents us from being decisive in minor circumstances, but it also can profoundly effect major decisions as well.

Sometimes described as an "affliction of affluence", FOBO is heavily impacted by the overwhelming choices we have as a result of the mass introduction of internet-connected technologies (online shopping as an example, giving us potentially thousands of choices when purchasing a single product).

Fear Of a Better Option also often plays out in our daily lives in other ways as well, such as delaying a social commitment on the chance a better option might come along.

**FOBO can be present in much larger and more important circumstances, however:** Multinational corporations may justify *not* doing something based on big data analysis; in

the past few years).

**Bounded Rationality** is the idea that we make decisions that are rational, but our ability to make such decisions is limited by the *complexity* of the decision problem, the *cognitive limitations of the mind*, and the *time* we have to make the decision, among other things.

Simply put, the more decision factors there are and the more pressure we are under, the more difficult a decision is to make.

Consider this rather simple example: you want to buy an ultrasonic toothbrush; you are in a shop and you are under a time crunch and need to leave in 10 minutes for an important appointment. You visit an aisle where there are sixteen different toothbrushes, produced by three different manufacturers, and ranging in price from $55 to $195 with some models offering an almost bewildering array of features. What choice do you make and how do you make it? Do you just grab the first toothbrush you see (unlikely given the cost factor here) or do you simply defer your choice to another time?

Chances are, you will choose the latter option and simply leave the shop without making a purchase.

Now consider a different scenario: your shop carries just two different types of ultrasonic toothbrushes, both are of good quality and the different features of each are easily defined. Your choice is much easier now and chances are pretty good that you will not defer your decision, and importantly, not second guess whether you made the right choice after your purchase.

Not only has this second scenario been less taxing on you mentally and emotionally, it is a decided victory for the retailer who made your choice easier and made the sale much more likely!

**Now consider Bounded Rationality in the context of tactical or strategic decision making in the investigative and intelligence world**. Decision makers strongly influenced by Bounded Rationality will tend to act as "Satisficers" (a blend of the words *satisfy* and *suffice)* and seek *satisfactory* solutions rather than *optimal* ones.

Add the pressure of "Groupthink" (when the desire for harmony or conformity in a group of people results in an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome) to Bounded Rationality, and it's not hard to see how poor decisions can often be made (and justified) within any organization.

**Loss Aversion**, refers to our preference and our tendency to avoid losses rather than to acquire equivalent gains. Prominent in the field of economics (example: It's better *not* to

some interesting psychological studies that suggest that we feel losses twice as much as we feel gains.  Particularly in workplace cultures where "success is rewarded in mediocre ways while mistakes are punished severely", loss aversion can be commonplace.

**So where does this leave us when it comes to efficiently making good decisions?**

Decision-making is a complex mental process and requires the brain's executive functions on a number of levels.  Understanding the overall concept of *how* we make decisions, both individually and en-masse, is essential to making *better* decisions.

A number of psychological studies have found that when it comes to decision-making, people can generally be split into two groups, the previously mentioned Satisficers, and also the "Maximizers".  Maximizers make choices based on maximum, optimal benefit, typically realized at a later time; Satisficers on the other hand, make choices based on modest criteria and seek a satisfactory (but generally not an optimal) solution.

As an example in daily life, Maximizers may pay more for a bigger living space than they actually need in case they want a more space in future; a Satisficer is likely to choose a living space that is good enough for now.  Interestingly, Maximizers set high standards for themselves and are disappointed when they fail to reach them, lingering on what was lost rather than what they have (enter the concept of after-the-fact "loss aversion").

As we often say during the critical-thinking components of our training programs, self-awareness is an essential element to success in seeing things "as they are" as opposed to "how we see them" (or worse, "how we want to see them").

With this in mind, it is imperative we constantly check in with ourselves and "think about our thinking while we are thinking it", if we are to accurately assess any situation, draw the right conclusions, and ultimately, make the right decisions.

So what kind of decision-maker are you, a Maximizer or a Satisficer?  And how does this impact your role as an investigator, as an intelligence professional, or as a manager?

How can you reach better conclusions, make better decisions, and find optimal solutions, especially when under pressure?

The answer starts with understanding critical-thinking and decision-making processes to a much higher degree as well as being aware of our own biases and the cognitive distortions we are all subject to.

And finally, if you are still stuck trying to decide on what to watch on Netflix tonight, consider giving yourself a break and let the Netflix Roulette website make the decision for you.

- *David Toddington is the Founder and CEO of Toddington International.  Learn more about David Toddington and his work here.*

**To book training with TII's David Toddington for your team, please contact us.**

## Upcoming Select Public Courses
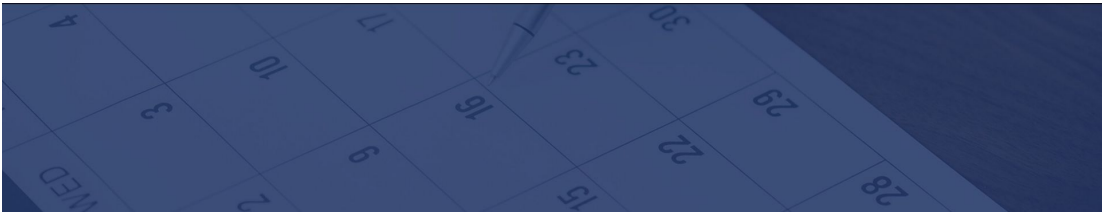
| Dates | Location | Courses |
|---|---|---|
| Mar 12 - 13, 2020 | Vancouver, BC | Advanced Internet Intelligence & Online Investigations |
| Mar 19 - 20, 2020 | Toronto, ON | Advanced Internet Intelligence & Online Investigations |
| Apr 20 - 21, 2020 | Vancouver, BC | Critical Thinking for Investigators |
| Apr 27 - 28, 2020 | Toronto, ON | Critical Thinking for Investigators |
| May 7 - 8, 2020 | Toronto, ON | Social Media Intelligence & Investigation |
| May 18 - 19, 2020 | Sydney, AU | Advanced Internet Intelligence & Online Investigations |

**Don't see the course you're looking for?  TII is pleased to offer a number of specialized and customizable in-house training programs for both the public and private sectors internationally.  To learn more about what we can do to empower your workforce, contact us.**

https://bit.ly/2IdFtVl - From the the Johns Hopkins Center for Systems Science and Engineering, a regularly updated online dashboard for tracking the worldwide spread of the coronavirus outbreak.

https://datasetsearch.research.google.com - Google's Dataset Search has indexed almost 25 million databases giving users a single site to search for, and find links to the data they require.

https://www.emsisoft.com/ransomware-decryption-tools/paradise?__c=1 - A free decryption tool for a form of ransomware that has plaguing victims since 2017 has been updated with additional capabilities to make it more effective at returning encrypted files – without the need to give into the demands of cyber criminals.

https://offshoreleaks.icij.org - International Consortium of Investigative Journalists Offshore Leaks Database.  Search people, companies, and addresses connected to offshore entities by country or jurisdiction.

https://www.apple.com/ca/ios/maps/ - Apple Maps: Alternative to Google Maps, with 3D previews (Look Around), bird's-eye views, directions, and much more.

https://www.4sqmap.com - Web application for visualizing Foursquare maps and statistics.

https://webmii.com/ - Webmii people search engine for locating possible associates, social media content, images, Web results, and more.

https://www.newsguardtech.com/coronavirus-misinformation-tracking-center/ - Coronavirus Misinformation Tracking Center's listing of news and information sites in the US, UK, France, Italy, and Germany that have been identified as publishing misinformation about the virus.

https://search.carrot2.org/#/web - Clustering meta search engine that organizes search results by topics.

https://www.alphadictionary.com/index.shtml - Dictionary search, with over 1,065

https://29a.ch/photo-forensics/#forensic-magnifier - Forensically, free online photo forensics tool for analyzing images.

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## "How-To's" and Articles of Interest for the OSINT Professional
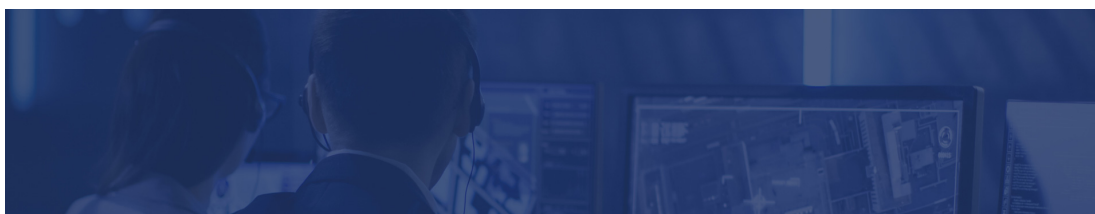


Street (view) brawl? Apple Maps has been slowly expanding regional coverage for its Google Street View-like "Look Around" feature (iOS 13). Rollouts have been spotted for Philadelphia, Boston and Washington, DC so far.

As Covid-19 spreads around the world, getting accurate information about the disease becomes ever more important. In the age of social media that puts a heavy responsibility on the likes of Facebook and YouTube (and also on you, the Information Consumer).

Image searching: The Smithsonian Institution is releasing 2.8 million high-resolution images from its massive collection into the public domain, putting them online for anyone to use and download for free.

Important privacy news as Firefox starts switching browser users to encrypted-DNS services, potentially making it more difficult for Internet Service Providers or other third parties to monitor what websites you visit.

Last year Google was experimenting with a new local Search Engine Results Page that highlighted alternative directory sources - An updated version of the SERP featuring branded directory buttons has now gone live in Europe.

Here's a clue for would-be Internet financial scammers: do not target librarians (or any professional researchers for that matter). They will catch on fast, and you will have wasted your time.

Image search news: While not yet live, Google has launched a new structured data element for image license metadata that allows Google Images to show a licensable image label in the search results.

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misinformation posted by politicians and other public figures, according to a leaked demo of new features.

"They happen to sell products, but they are a data company" - Why Amazon knows so much about you.

Mozilla and Google are cracking down on malicious and abusive extensions available for the Firefox and Chrome browsers, removing hundreds of add-ons.

Yahoo!'s time capsule will reveal the distant past… of 2006.

FBI seizes WeLeakInfo.com, a marketplace for data hacked from other sites.  By purchasing a subscription, hackers could gain access to billions of userids and passwords (and it's not the only site like it out there).

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