

Tech Beat Article

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Is Email A Time Killer for You?

Email has become the number two time waster for many people, second only to unproductive meetings, and in many cases, comes in at number one as the biggest killer of productivity.

According to the National Research Bureau, the average businessperson now sends and receives about 90 messages a day. Under ideal conditions, people are spending at least 28 - 94 minutes a day handling E-Mails. Under less than ideal conditions, people are spending up to 2_ hours each day managing email.

Email can diminish productivity in many ways. We need to learn to be more effective and efficient with how we manage our inboxes, handle incoming mail, and how we send out our replies.

It takes an average of 2 minutes to read and respond to an email and then another minute to regain our focus and get back to work. To avoid getting distracted all day long, change the settings in your email program to disable both the bell and the visual cue. Or change the time between automatically checking messages. Then, determine how frequently you want to check your email.

Another possibility is to check and respond to email in the morning, after lunch, and before leaving work. Or, check email only one time each hour. In most cases, people can wait for your response. Email can be processed much more quickly when it is done in blocks all at once, rather than one at a time as it comes in.

Another of the big problems we face with email is the sheer volume we receive. It is not uncommon to see people with 2,000 or more emails in their inbox. Your inbox is like your mailbox, and you probably don't use your mailbox to store bills, letters or junk mail.

Delete email regularly that you don't need to keep. For email from friends, clients or projects that you want to keep, you can create separate folders. Once you have read the message and responded to it, both can be stored in their folder for easy retrieval in the future.

Outlook and other email programs include filtering options that allow you to set up filters that will send email from known senders into their mailboxes. Setting these filters up can save you the step of moving them from your inbox into the designated folders.

The length of emails we send can save – or waste – a lot of time. Being succinct and brief does everyone a favor. I like to apply what Einstein said to writing email, “just enough, and nothing more.” Many people only read what comes up in the preview pane, so keep your messages to 10 lines or less when possible.

Make your action requests clear to anyone you are sending an email to. If you are sending email to a number of people, be sure that everyone you are sending to knows why they are being included.

There are several ways we can increase productivity in replying to email. One way is to adopt and use response conventions in the subject line within your organization. Some of the most common are “NRN” (no response necessary) when no response to your email is needed, or “EOM” (end of message) if you are doing something like confirming that you will be able to attend a meeting. In that case, you would write, “Confirming Meeting 11/4 EOM.”

Be sure that the subject line in your email relates to what is in the body of your email. We all have sent and received many generations of an email with the same subject line, where the email we are sending can have nothing at all to do with what is in the subject line. It saves time if you need to refer to an email in the future to be able to just go back and find what you are looking for with a clear description in the subject line.

Email can be a powerful tool for saving time and increasing productivity, or it can be an enemy of productivity. Increasing your awareness of when and how to use it can make a big difference. Don't forget that in some cases, the phone may be faster.

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