

Masterclass

Monica Seeley explains how the time and cost of email overload can be reclaimed and outlines the way to take control of your inbox.

Take control

What would you do if you could create an extra hour a day every day? Learn a new skill, read a new book, spend more time with your family, improve your golf handicap, finish the quilt you started 18 months ago, have a proper lunch break, go home on time?

In my book, *Brilliant Email*, I say all these ambitions are achievable if you take control of email rather than let it control you. At least one hour per person per day is wasted through inefficient use and management of email. Based on a 46-week working year (and average hourly rate of £20), this amounts to an additional overhead of £4,600 per year or 31 days per person per year.

With the emphasis on efficiency and cost-cutting, who can afford to lose this amount of time and productivity? Email overload is not only a major source of wasted time it is also a major source of stress, which further lowers productivity. Monica says all too often people rely on emails, when a telephone conversation or instant message would be more appropriate. The result instead is a barrage of emails, of which only 25-75% is often relevant. People can lose 15 minutes each time they stop to deal with incoming mail.

The top five sources of email overload are:

- unnecessary emails e.g. “who has my blue mug?”, “thanks”, cc’d emails and the use of Reply to All. How many of the emails you receive do you really need to do your job?
- poorly written emails. How many emails do you read several times before you understand exactly what the recipient has asked/told you?

Masterclass tips: How to save up to an hour a day

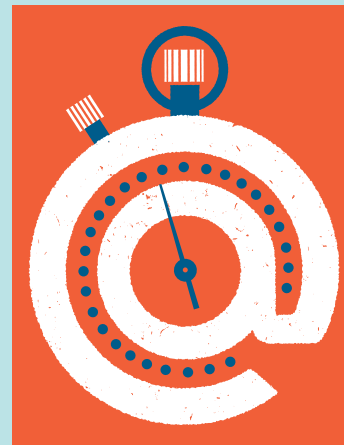
Prioritise the emails you really need. Use filters (rules) to help you manage the flow of emails.

Improve your time management. Learn to say ‘no’ to the emails you do not need.

Switch off all new mail notifications. Focus on the task in-hand for at least half an hour before peeking at new emails.

Handle each email once. Adopt the 4Ds principle to process each email: deal, delete, delegate or defer action.

Write your emails in plain clear grammatically correct English. Avoid text speak and sloppy grammar.



- using email when an alternative would be more appropriate. When was the last time you picked up the phone, walked to talk to someone, even sent an Instant Message instead of playing email tag?
- constantly dipping in and out of the inbox rather than focusing on the task in hand. Do you peek at each new email as it arrives?
- lack of adequate skills to use the email software. Have you ever been trained to use the tool on which we most rely for business? Additionally, there is the extra carbon footprint to keep bulging servers running, and toner and paper. Many people still print not just occasional emails, but all their emails and in colour.

However, this is time (and costs)

that can quickly and easily be reclaimed, and the levels of email stress lowered by enabling people to take control of their inbox rather than letting it drive them and their day.

Dr Monica Seeley, founder of Mesmo Consultancy, posts daily tips as the ‘Emaildoctor’ on Twitter and is a senior visiting fellow at the Cass Business School, City University. Her research studies include the future of email and the use of social networking tools to gain sustainable business benefits. *Brilliant Email* is published by Pearson and is available from Amazon at amzn.to/bN09LH and other leading bookstores. More information is available at www.brilliant-email.com or www.mesmo.co.uk.