

# Coming to terms with emails



By Debbie Mayo-Smith

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You love it. You hate it. You write off your first half-hour in the office wading through it. It's the last thing you check before you leave. It's your preferred method of communication. But the volume is driving you crazy. And then there's the actual sifting through to see the ones you want.

And it's not just you. Almost everyone working with email is increasingly stressed. From the CEO to personal assistants and managers, so much time is wasted needlessly. Why? Lack of knowledge of their email program's capabilities (combined with some "clever thinking") makes them work inefficiently, stunting productivity.

## Your solution

You can't stop what comes into your inbox beyond what your IT team and ISP filter out as spam or as being inappropriate. However, you can easily start to conquer your email overload. Here are four tips to help boost your productivity. And share these ideas with your clients. They'll love you all the more for it.

## Before you begin

Think strategically. Look through your inbox for patterns – types of emails that are handled the same way. Which are your top priority and which are the lowest? If you have a website or email newsletter, note what emails come in from them, both to you and others in your company.

## Build your inbox filing cabinet

You organise your documents into folders, don't you? Likewise, create inbox folders to "put your emails away". They not only become the backbone of your inbox, they

work in tandem with rules, which is our next tip. Before we move on – a great little trick is to put a number or letter before your folder names to organise them the way you want, rather than allow the default alphabetical listing.

## Your automatic inbox secretary – rules

Why oh why is this top inbox function practically unknown? Using rules can be life-changing for you. It's that dramatic. You'll find rules under the tools menu and a program wizard walks you through setting them up. Rules can be your eyes and hands – reading, filing, sorting, answering, deleting and forwarding your incoming (or outgoing) emails.

### Sample rule ideas

- \* Put emails not directly addressed to me in my "CC or BCC" folder.
- \* Delay sending my emails by 10 minutes after I press the send button (your re-think time).
- \* Segregate incoming client emails into their respective folders.
- \* Put all Institute emails into the Institute folder.
- \* Automatically delete anything with the word Viagra in it.
- \* Put website enquiries or newsletter subscriptions into folders.
- \* If the word "email mailing list for \$25" appears in the body of an email delete it.

## Never forget to follow up again

Tasks. This is your automatic memory or "to do" list. Create a task from scratch, manage projects with them, assign tasks to others – it's the best thing since sliced bread. Here are some task ideas.

1. Prompt yourself to telephone clients on a quarterly basis.
2. Remind yourself to follow up on an important email/quote/proposal you sent.
3. Remind yourself to ensure you received an email/call you were waiting for.
4. Assign tasks to staff members and follow their progress.
5. Create a recurring task and send it to your clients to remind them to send you their GST information.

## Drag and drop

You know how to drag and drop emails into folders – so why not drop emails into your calendar, contacts or tasks? Each will open a new item with the entire email text intact. If you receive an email from someone you'd like to add to your contacts, just drag and drop their email into your contacts folder. A new contact opens, with the email address and name filled in. You exhibit true signs of a genius when you highlight and drag their signature elements into the appropriate fields (company, position, phone and fax). ■

## Hidden business cost of email

Time is money. Even if half-an-hour is wasted each day with employees trawling needlessly through all their emails, this can equate to \$3000 lost productivity per year, per employee!

Based on 200 business days a year:  $200 \times 0.5 = 100$  hours per year.

$100 \times \$30$  per hour wage = \$3000

Now take this figure and multiply it by the number of employees using email in any organisation.

The cost is enormous.