Managing Your Email

Do you feel overwhelmed every time you open your electronic mailbox? If you are like the average wired worker, you get dozens of emails each day. If you feel buried under a mountain of spam and worry that you will miss important messages, there are techniques you can use to organize and prioritize your email for maximum productivity.

The Emergence of Email

Email is taking the place of telephone calls, meetings, and even face-to-face conversations as a means of communicating at work. More messages are sent today via email than through the U.S. Postal Service. While this can be an efficient way to get things done, it can also result in a dizzying number of items cluttering up your email inbox, making it more difficult to keep tasks organized and prioritized.

Some email messages are unsolicited junk mail called "spam." Some may be personal messages, chain letters, jokes and gags sent to you by friends. It is easy for the more urgent work-related messages to get lost among these other messages. While at work, you should focus only on messages related to your job.

Here are some suggestions to help you better handle your email, which, when used properly, is a truly effective business tool:

- **Understand your email program:** Most of us are adept at sending and receiving basic email. Your email program most likely can help you do much more. If your company's technology department offers a course on email, take it. You may be surprised by the number of options and efficiencies you can employ by having more than just a basic knowledge of your program. Learning how to sort and file, attach, or open different kinds of documents or link your email to the Internet can make you a more efficient and interesting emailer.

- **Plan time to check email:** Avoid jumping in and out of your mailbox just to see if anything is there. Set aside time during the day to check your mail: first thing in the morning, just before lunch, late afternoon and just before you leave work. You will have time to read and act on emails more efficiently in batches. With some email packages, you can set preferences to alert you if an urgent email arrives.

- **Do it now:** There is an old maxim in time-management and office-organization seminars that says "touch paper once." This holds true for electronic messages, too. When you read your email, take any necessary or appropriate actions immediately. Handle the subject of the email right away, respond to it, file it or delete it. If someone else can better address the matter, forward the email to that person, and ask him or her to copy you on the response. If an email requires you to check some information or write a longer response, acknowledge the email, and store it in your electronic to-do folder with the expected response deadline.

- **Get a second address:** Obtain another email address to use specifically for personal matters. Use your work email account only for messages related to your job. This is a good way to keep emails related to personal matters separate from emails that demand your attention at work.

- **Unsubscribe:** Right off the top, you can cut down on the number of unwanted emails by asking to be removed from various email distribution lists. Many junk-mail lists have purchased your email address from third parties so they can send you solicitations. Reply and ask that they delete your name from their lists. If that does not work, consider blocking or filtering incoming mail from those particular addresses. If you are being copied on an internal work email that does not relate to your job, diplomatically ask the sender to copy you only when the email directly pertains to your area of responsibility. Determine which emails you really need to be copied on. Your company most likely has a policy on inappropriate use of email at work. If your friends are sending you jokes or video clips that could be considered offensive, ask them to stop sending them to your work address.

Email Etiquette

Here are some common sense e-etiquette tips:

- **Use spelling- and grammar-checking software:** Many people seem to think spelling errors are more acceptable in the email realm. They are not.

- **If you are writing an email in anger, stop and think carefully before you send it:** Anger in the workplace is a serious issue. Your email is a permanent record of your interactions with co-workers, is open to interpretation and could be taken out of context. When in doubt, do not hit the send button until after you have calmed down and carefully considered the right way to say what you feel.

- **Do not use email as a weapon:** Some people get into the habit of using email to deliver messages they would not think of saying face to face. If you would not say it, do not email it.

- **Do not overuse priority or urgent message tags:** These tags should be reserved for emails that require both immediate attention and for which there will be negative consequences if the sender does not receive immediate attention.

- **Do not overuse capital letters:** It gives your reader the feeling that you are shouting at him or her.

- **You do not need the formality of "Dear" or "Sincerely yours":** Your "to" and "from" boxes have that address information. Ending the message with your name is always a good idea, though.

- **Write a short descriptive title in the subject box.** This will help others file and manage their email.

Use Email Management Software

There are several software packages that can help you manage your email. If you are overwhelmed with email, you might want to try a program that allows you to track and organize critical messages while sorting out the junk messages. These programs usually can filter out spam sent indiscriminately to thousands of addresses.

If you have several email accounts, it can be time-consuming to check each of these accounts separately. Some software will allow you to create a universal inbox that will forward all of your incoming emails to a single account. Some software will organize and track your email so it meshes with your daily calendar. Such programs combine the functions of a personal information manager and regular email.

Email was designed as a way to make communication more efficient. Unfortunately, as with many technologies, learning to use it can be such a time-consuming process that it negates any time savings. By following a few simple principles, email can increase your productivity and efficiency and allow you to manage your personal and business communications effectively.

Resources

- U.S. Small Business Administration: www.sba.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNow SM

Web ID: LivingME