

## Top Ten Ways to Handle Email Overload

One of the biggest problems we face today is handling large quantities of information. Our technology and access to information is impressive but it's a double-edged sword. It fills our minds and our lives with clutter. The challenge is to sort, filter, organize, discard and assimilate the massive amounts of data we're exposed to on a daily basis. So what are we to do? Here are a few ideas to help manage your inbox better.

### 1. Don't Check Mail Every Few Minutes

This is a tough one for me, but it's much more efficient and you'll stay more focused on your current work if you're not constantly checking for new mail. If you have a direct connection and your mail is delivered automatically, you can still wait to respond every two hours or so. By assigning a specific time to read and reply, you'll definitely gain efficiency.

### 2. Flag Messages for Later Action

My wife thinks I go a bit overboard with this feature, but it's the only way I can keep track of the messages that need attention but can't deal with right away. My program (MS Outlook) allows me to set the action and the time and date of the reminder. You can still procrastinate, but at least you know which ones and how many you're avoiding.

### 3. Use Folders

Most email programs allow you to create folders (and even subfolders) to sort your mail. This usually makes finding messages much easier. A small downside—at least for MS Outlook—is that your flagged messages will no longer give you reminders if you've filed the message in a folder other than your inbox.

### 4. Set up Rules

Most good email programs will allow you to automatically sort your email as it comes in. This is done based on a set of criteria you establish such as the content, the sender's email address, the address to which it's sent, etc. You can do this by colour-coding the email or by sending it to a particular folder—even the deleted items folder.

### 5. Deal with Similar Responses All At Once

By sorting your mail using the methods described above, you can now deal with similar messages all at once. You save time by not having to look up the same info all over again.

### 6. Templates

If your email client allows you to create templates, use them. They'll save you oodles of time for those responses that require the same or similar information on a regular basis. Just create your new message based upon your pre-established template and edit as needed. You can also set up sig files (see below) and use them as boilerplate responses or mini-templates.

### **7. Cut, Copy, Paste**

One of the most powerful features of today's operating systems and office suites is the ability to cut and paste—sometimes multiple pieces—of information to transfer from one document to another. Save the typing time. Copy from other documents and paste into email. If you don't know how to use this feature, learn today. You'll wonder how you got by without it.

### **8. Make Heavy Use of the Delete Key**

Hardly anything can free up your inbox more than deleting email you don't want. Hitting the delete key or delete button is the best way to dump data.

### **9. Signature Files**

I use different signatures for different parts of my business—five or six of them, in fact. I also create them for boilerplate paragraphs to insert common responses into my messages. It's very powerful.

### **10. Customize Your Program**

Most people use only 20-30% of a program's capability. Take this up to even 50% and you'll marvel at your added efficiency. Investing some time in learning more of the features of your email program and then customizing it to work the way YOU want it to will pay big dividends.