

8 Easy Ways to Cut Down Email Overload

By Beth Schneider, Process Prodigy

I'll tell you a little secret. Back in the mid 90's I actually used to go for weeks at a time without checking my email. When I finally did, there would be a whopping 20 email messages. A little note from a pal. The occasional work related message. The joke of the day. 20 whole messages, in a week, can you believe it?

Now I get 20 messages in like 5 minutes. Do you ever miss the "good ole' days" of email? When you could actually sit down, read and handle everything in a small amount of time? For many, what used to be a great convenience has become just another task to tackle.

No, you can't give up email cold turkey. It's here to stay. But it doesn't have to be so hard or overwhelming. Here are **8 easy ways** to cut down on the constant shuffle and overwhelming amount of email you handle every day. And I'm not just talking about spam filters.

Step One: Create an Email Process

Don't get stuck in the email cycle where you end up reading the same email several times and still don't act on it. Pick a specific time to check your mail. Maybe once or twice an hour. Read it once, complete what you need from it and then move on.

Step Two: Use Instant Messenger

Instant messenger is not just for kids chatting about the happenings of the 8th grade. Rather than shooting off an email and waiting for a response or having a conversation by sending emails back and forth, try using instant messenger. It's great for quick check-ins and getting answers fast. Sign up for a free messenger service like MSN, give your contact info to those you communicate with on a regular basis (like your assistant) and talk in real time rather than filling up your in-box.

Step Three: Try a Wiki

No, this is not a Hawaiian tropical drink. Are you stuck in the trap where you are constantly getting the latest version of a contract or the latest redesign of a design? If you're in a place where several people are sending different versions of documents back and forth, it might make sense for you to try a Wiki. A Wiki is a software program that allows users to create and update web pages easily and rapidly. This creates a central location where several people can log in, see and work on the same document. No more emails back and fourth. Inc. magazine recommends jotspot.com. See if it's for you.

Step Four: Schedule a meeting

Got stuff to talk about? Don't send an email. Rather than spreading out your requests over what could be a couple dozen emails, schedule a quick 10 minute meeting. Quickly review what needs to be covered, answer all questions at one time and move on.

Step Five: Put an FAQ page on your website

Do you find yourself getting the same questions from your customers over and over again? Try adding the answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ) on your website. Or even be more proactive and send the FAQ to new clients when they buy your product or sign up for your service.

Step Six: Remember the phone

Hey remember that old fangled invention called the telephone? Sometimes it seems easier

to just shoot off an email, but the phone can dramatically cut down on the number of emails ending up in your inbox. For example, a client of mine recently told me she made a coffee date with a colleague. What could have been 3 minutes on the phone comparing schedules turned into 8 back and forth email's trying to pick the perfect date to talk over chai lattes. Don't fill up your box if you don't need to.

Step Seven: Automatically sort your email

Most email programs allow you to sort and highlight automatically. Learn to use features like Outlook rules so you can quickly identify those messages that are most important to you. For instance, I have a client who set up a rule that sends all website leads to a special folder. This doesn't cut down on the number of emails coming in, but it sure makes it's a whole lot easier for his assistant (and NOT him) to process those leads.

Step Eight: Use multiple email addresses

Get lots of newsletters and announcements? Set up a special box just for those kinds of mailers so that you can read them when you want to. Again, doesn't cut down on the number of email's coming through, but makes it easier for you to get to the items you want to see first.

Make email fun again. It doesn't have to be so overwhelming.

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