

Better Use of email can increase productivity

Information and strategies for "Taming Technology"

"Oh, I'm just going to "quickly" check my email..." How many times have you said that and the next thing you know its two hours later? I do it all the time! Since it's the New Year and we're all suppose to look at making changes for the better, I have resolved to improve my use of time and better take control of email; here is some interesting information and strategies for "Taming Technology".

Research has found that the interrupt effect from email is more than might be expected. In several different studies, people allowed themselves to be interrupted almost as frequently (every five minutes) as they are with telephone calls. The common reaction to the arrival of an email message is not to delay the response to a time that is more convenient to the user but to react within six seconds--almost as quickly as they would respond to a telephone call.

The interrupt effect ends up being comparable to that of a telephone call. However, the recovery time--returning to work at the same work rate at which it was left--(64 seconds) is significantly less than some published recovery times for telephone calls. Email interrupts reduce recovery time, but we receive more and more email which means we're not saving ANY time.

Here are some recommendations for taking control of email:

On an organization level:

- Establish an organization-wide or a department-wide protocol for effective and efficient email processing strategies. For example, establishing no-email-hours (or days). This also encourages face-to-face communication.
- Establish a priority scheme for responding to emails. Define priorities for each category of email that arrives and process accordingly. Refrain from using the FIFO approach.
- Discourage continuous email processing.

On an individual level:

- Process email two to four times a day.
- Set specific times in a day for processing emails.
- Develop rules of thumb for email processing in sync with organizational policies and culture.
- **Turn off the new-email-alert dialogue box and email sound alerts.**
- **Set the email software to check for email no more than every 45 minutes.**

I have implemented the bolded items above. I cannot express how pleased I am with the results. Rather than respond to every single email that come in to my mailbox, I am checking email every couple of hours. I am able to stay focused on the task at hand and have improved my workflow quite a bit! I challenge you to do the same and I'd LOVE to hear your results!

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