



TAME THE EMAIL BEAST

If you're not careful, half your day can vanish down your inbox's throat!

A survey of almost 600 professionals showed **two-thirds** of them spent **2-6 hours** per day JUST on email. And **90 percent** of them wasted up to an **hour** each day deciphering poorly-written emails or handling irrelevant ones.

Email should make you more productive, not less! Here are some smart tips to help you:

- tame your inbox (get control)
- escape the "delete" key (get opened)
- be more persuasive (get actioned).

Enjoy your renewed productivity,

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P.S. These tips are for normal business emails, not marketing ones. For a guide to marketing/sales writing, request our article, "**Ignite Your Writing & Results**".

1. Get control

- **Who's your DAAD-y?**

Stop living in your inbox! Set it to download emails only every hour or two. You WILL survive. In fact, you'll thrive because you'll eliminate your constant email distractions, and be free to focus on one thing at a time.

Step 1: Make *processing* your inbox a separate step you do every hour or two. Remind yourself of your main priorities, then process into these folders:

- > **Delete**
- > **Action** – To be done or delegated
- > **Archive** – File for reference or reading
- > **Defer** – Add to your calendar or task list

Step 2: Then *prioritise* according to urgency and importance into folders marked:

- > "A" = **Must** do
- > "B" **Should** do
- > "C" = **Nice** to do

Step 3: Go to your "Action folder at *predetermined* times to whip through as many as possible – priority "A" first.

- **Go easy on the "Cc:"s**

Too many people Cc: others "just in case". This is the "CYA approach" (Cover Your Assumptions). Stop and think: Do each of these *really* need to know? If they do, tell them clearly in the email what they should do with it.

- **Answer & anticipate questions**

Being in too much of a rush to clear your inbox can be counter-productive. You may not answer people's questions properly, or anticipate their *next* questions, which can lead to even *more* emails for you.

For example, if someone emails asking what credit cards you take, consider including extra information such as an order form and delivery details with your reply.

- **How have you "trained" them?**

If people are banging down your door because you haven't replied within 10 minutes of them emailing, it's because you've "trained" them that way. Time to start changing expectations!

- > Reply promptly, but not immediately
- > Answer briefly—It's ok just to write, "Sure, great idea," to their 10-page epistle!
- > "Relevant?"—If you're Cc:d on too many emails, reply with "Relevant?" to help people learn what you *do* and *don't* need to see. But tell them your intentions in advance, reassuring them it's about relevance, not criticism.

- **Charge!**

One CEO began charging her subordinates \$5 from their budgets for every email they sent her. She immediately brought her inbox under control, and the relevance of her emails rose dramatically. Her staff also benefited—they started thinking more, often solving their own problems.

- **Email is tone deaf**

Sometimes your best email is no email at all—especially if you're trying to sort out an awkward situation.

Hiding behind your screen is a recipe for misunderstanding and disaster. Call or visit them instead. Besides, talking to a real person builds relationships, which are critical to business.

- **Fight spam**

In 2016, 53% of the world's email was spam. Microsoft says it costs the world \$20 billion per year in lost productivity. Here's how to fight back:

- > **Protect your email address.** Address harvesters crawl websites looking for email addresses, so remove yours, or change it so the spiders can't "see" it (look up "Address munging" on Wikipedia). And only "unsubscribe" from spam if you know the company (otherwise it tells spammers you're a "live" one!).

- > **Use commercial anti-spam software and a hardware firewall.** What's worse than spam? A virus using your computer as a "zombie", sending spam to millions of others!
- > **Report it.** Forward the spam to the Australian Government's Spam Intelligence Database: report@submit.spam.acma.gov.au

2. Get opened

- **Subject-header summaries**

People can scan their inbox by subject header, so summarise your message there.

If they delete your email without opening it, they'll at least get the gist of your message.

Avoid: Conference call

Try: Conference call: Fri 3pm – Review training budget

- **Benefits, baby, yeah!**

A subject header, like any headline, has to interest people enough to keep them reading.

If you suspect someone might not open your email, make your subject header as appealing as possible to them.

How? We teach a variety of ways in our courses, but **benefits** is a biggie. That is, what's in it for your reader? If you were them, what would make *you* want to keep reading?

- **Keep it short**

Keep your subject header to 40-60 characters (including spaces).

This not only ensures people can read your subject header quickly, but helps it fit within their email window where they can read it.

This is especially important today, as 67% of emails are now read on mobile devices.

- **Agree on acronyms**

For internal emails, agreeing on subject-header acronyms with your team can really speed things up. For example:

- > AR – Action required
- > NRN – No reply necessary
- > PERS – Personal

3. Get actioned

- **It's all about them**

If you assume readers are lazy, busy and selfish you'll get better results:

- > **Lazy.** Make things as easy as possible for your readers. Give it all to them on a platter. Do you want them to call someone? Include the number. Want them to notice certain information. **Highlight it.**
- > **Busy.** Keep it short and to the point. Think "postcard". Organise your topics for them logically. Include subheadings to signpost information. Use bullets and numbered lists so they can skim-read. And use [Credosity](#) to make it short, sharp and clear.
- > **Selfish.** Don't just talk about what *you* want. Show how it'll also help them get what *they* want. And say that in the first few sentences.

- **"So what?"**

As you write, imagine your reader asking, "So what?" after each of your points. Explain the relevance. Draw conclusions for them. Tell them what *you'll* do and what you want *them* to do.

- **Be proactive**

If someone emails you asking, "Like to meet to discuss this?" reply with specifics. Write: "Sure. How about next Thursday at 4pm? I'll send you an agenda by COB Tuesday for your comments."

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Anticipating next steps will reduce the email traffic needed to arrive at a simple decision.

- **Make responding easy**

Make it easy for your reader to respond with yes/no or a short reply.

Avoid: “Let me know your thoughts about Lisa’s proposal.”

Try: “Should we adopt Lisa’s proposal?”

- **Crystal-clear requests**

Most people can’t mind-read. If you want a certain action, ask for it, simply and clearly.

Avoid: Can you organise the meeting?

Try: To ensure the meeting is productive, can you please do these by Wed. 28 June?

1. Book boardroom
2. Organise catering
3. Distribute agenda

- **Use the “5-30” Rule**

Lead with the gold! Don’t make them wade through your whole email trying to find your key idea or message—they may not scroll down to see it.

First, tell the **5-second** overview of your story, then the **30-second** version.

Here’s an example of the 5-second one:

“This update includes a review of our recent projects, current priorities, and info about next week’s meeting.”

- **Separate topics**

Use separate emails for separate topics. That way each thread can continue free of others.

If someone sends an email with two completely unrelated topics, send two responses, one for each topic—and change the subject header accordingly for each.

- **Don’t email**

Lastly, if your reader is drowning in email, try another medium, like SMS or a phone call. And for internal email, try Skype for Business or Slack; they can drastically reduce everyone’s email load.

Copywriter, trainer and speaker, **Paul Jones**, is on a mission to help business communicate better and faster.

He’s co-founder of [Magneto Communications](#) and [Credosity](#), a digital writing coach.

Questions? Like to know more? Fire an email to training@magneto.net.au

