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Email overload creating a communication "black hole"

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Managing emails efficiently doesn't come naturally to most people, but implementing a system for your messages can save you around five hours a week in lost productivity.

According to Clive Wallace, managing director of e-commerce and IT company WallCann, recent research shows the majority of workers suffer from some form of email overload.



Many people waste time storing and sorting through hundreds of emails in their inbox and creating a "communication black hole" where important messages go unanswered. Wallace calls this "email bankruptcy".

"Email bankrupts are people who in desperation choose to delete, archive, or ignore email messages without ever reading or responding to them," he says.

People at risk include those who:

- accumulate emails in their inbox as a way to remind themselves about tasks they need to do;
- leave emails they haven't yet read sitting in their inbox;
- have in-progress correspondence in their inbox.

Emails left in an inbox are a huge waste of time, Wallace says. "Think of how many times you have read a particular email only to put it back into the inbox for future action."

Minimise disruption

The first step in successful email management is to minimise disruption caused by incoming messages, Wallace says.

"To use email effectively, *you* should pick the moment at which you're going to be interrupted by receiving an email - why let the sender of the email pick the time at which you're going to pay attention?"

He suggests using your email signature block to educate email senders that you are now using best practice methods. You should then set email-free zones so that you can work undistracted on the priority issues on your agenda.

Operate from an empty inbox

Wallace says there are two best practice strategies for managing email; implementing them ensures that the volume of email you receive doesn't create a problem.

The first strategy is to operate from an empty inbox. Starting from this point and regularly clearing out emails prevents tasks from falling



through the cracks, he says. "As emails disappear from view in an overflowing inbox, they tend to disappear from your memory as well and tasks can be missed."

An empty inbox at the end of the day also gives you a sense of achievement, while an overflowing inbox can be a source of stress, constantly reminding you of the number of emails requiring attention.

Triage incoming emails

The second strategy is to proactively manage your email activities. This requires both a behavioural change and an understanding of how technology can be used to manage tasks.

The best way to quickly deal with the emails in your inbox - and ensure you handle them only once - is to triage them at each email check.

The decision-making process for this involves the four Ds - ditch it, do it, defer it or delegate it.

The first two of these should be "common sense", Wallace says, but the way in which you handle the remaining two is what sets an efficient email manager apart from an email bankrupt. Understanding technology and in particular knowing how to use the "tasks" and "calendar" functions of Microsoft Outlook will assist in this process, he says.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to triaging emails and it's not something people do naturally and easily, Wallace says. Once you have a set process, however, "you never go back".

WallCann's training arm, WallCann Academy, runs short training courses on how to manage and use email. For details, [click here](#).

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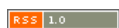
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