

Eight Easy Steps to Enhance Email Efficiency

It's not all that often I can spend more than ten minutes at my computer without hearing that familiar chime of an incoming email. Even with the speakers turned off, I can see the little envelope appear in the bottom right-hand corner of my computer screen. I can't help it... I have to check my email. It's addicting. I don't know too many people who can ignore the lure of an incoming email. I've had clients ask me more and more about how to handle their electronic mail. Too many of them are feeling like they're drowning in a sea of computer correspondence and are wondering how they can address these emails while continuing to work effectively and efficiently. If you're struggling with the same dilemma, try these eight easy steps:

1. Close your email. Don't just minimize it, but close and/or log out of whatever application you use for email. Staying logged on to your email provides a constant distraction every time another email message is received.
2. Allocate specific times during the day when you will address your email. For example, check first thing in the morning, then right before lunch, mid-afternoon, and then maybe ½ hour before you leave the office. Each time you will need to log in and then log out.
3. During your designated email time, read them and address them right away. Try to minimize the tendency to procrastinate and leave some responses until the next time you check email. This will only lead to a backlog.
4. Eliminate the spam! Similar to the junk mail you receive at home, get rid of spam immediately. If you don't already utilize anti-virus software with a spam blocking tool, it is well worth the time and money to look into adding this feature. Also when making online purchases, remember to look for an opportunity to opt out of the company's mass email promotions. Many times there will be a check box that lets you indicate whether or not you'd like to receive mailings. Just say "No!"
5. Creating subfolders: If you'd like to create subfolders for different projects, subjects, or clients, try to mirror the way you file the same information on your hard drive and in your paper files. Creating synergies throughout your files will ease the pain of trying to find the information you need quickly. (Note: if you use Microsoft Outlook, you can click on an email and drag it to a folder on your hard drive which would eliminate the need to keep it in your Inbox.)
6. Keeping Emails: Be aware of the string of emails kept during an email conversation. Most emails will have the entire conversation trail in the last email sent/received. Keep only that last email and delete the rest. If you're in the habit of keeping a record of your Sent emails, remember to incorporate these into the email filing system you're using. Sent emails pile up quickly, so stay on top of them.

7. Action Items: If there is an email that requires action at a later date, i.e., directions for a meeting, an agenda for a meeting, or if the email pertains to a call you need to make later in the week, schedule that information on your calendar. If you keep a Day Timer, you may want to print out the email and put it in your calendar. If your calendar is kept electronically, reference the back-up email related to that appointment (including the date of the email and who it is from) and keep the emails in a folder named appropriately, i.e., “Calendar Back-Up”, “Action Items”, “Meeting Preparation”, etc. (Note: if you use Microsoft Outlook, you can click on an email and drag it into your calendar. An appointment box will appear and you will be able to put that email in your calendar for a particular day and time.)
8. Flagging Messages: For those of you with the ability to flag an email message that you want to address at a later date, I will give you a few words of caution. Flagging messages is similar to hanging “To Do” items on a cork board or the refrigerator, if they stay there long enough, they become part of the scenery and will no longer stand out. Treat these emails the same as you would an Action Item mentioned in step 7 above. Utilize your calendar and schedule these follow-up emails as appointments for yourself.

These tips incorporate time management techniques as well as general organizing techniques that will make your work day run more efficiently. If you have feedback or additional suggestions of your own, please contact Cara Brook at SOSLLC@optonline.net or www.organizewithsos.com