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by *Ralph Lee Scott*

Global E-Mail

Had enough e-mail ALREADY? Have you come back from vacation with the message "You have 487 new messages?" Tired of your daily dose of 134 new messages? Spending three hours a day reading e-mails? What you need is better e-mail management (or some would say a life!). E-mail does have some advantages. It replaces slower technologies such as fax, internal newsletters, and "snail" mail. When there is time-critical information (like "the parking lot is filling up with water"), e-mail can get the word out to everyone online quickly. Since e-mail is not face-to-face, however, humor, anger, and rudeness can be misunderstood. E-mail can result in an acute case of embarrassment, such as when the names and e-mail addressess of 600 Prozac users were sent out in error around the world by Eli Lilly. (<http://back and neck.about.com/library/weekly/aa070901a.htm>) With people spending two to three hours a day reading e-mails, we are losing some of our ability to reach out to others on a personal basis. What we all need are good ideas for better handling and controlling of incoming and outgoing e-mail.

Some tips that apply to "snail" mail also can be used with e-mail. Handle each message only once, read it immediately and answer it or delegate right now! Route or delete certain classes of e-mail before opening. Get your name off distribution lists that don't add anything to your daily work. Indicate on a forwarded message what action is needed. Use the subject line to get attention; above all, don't send out messages that lack subject line! Check e-mail only a few times a day (when you come in, at lunch, and before going home.) Use work e-mail only for business use. Set up a separate e-mail account with Yahoo or a re-mailer for personal mails. Use e-mail rules to filter out and sort incoming mail. Check incoming e-mail messages for opportunities to unsubscribe from the bulk mailing. Keep virus definition files up-to-date.

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The most common e-mail software packages in use today are Microsoft's Outlook (part of the Office suite), Exchange, and Outlook Express (comes free with Internet Explorer). These packages have "Rule Wizards" to filter incoming mail. Other popular e-mail software packages usually have some sort of filtering function.

In the Outlook "Tools" pull down menu, you will find a "Rules Wizard." In "Outlook Express" (version 6), the wizard is called "Message Rules." In Microsoft "Exchange," the rules wizard is call "In Box Assistant." Gernerally, the "Rules Wizard" allows you to create a new rule and apply it to incoming mail. For instance, if you are getting lots of mail from "flowgo.com," you can create a rule that will: delete incoming mail, move it to a specific folder, send the mail to another person, flag the mail item, or archive the message. For example, mail that I receive from the UNC Faculty Assembly Listserv automatically goes into a special e-mail folder marked "Faculty Assembly." Mail that you are not interested in looking at, can be sent quickly to the delete folder. In addition, you tell the wizard what to do with specific types of text. If you are tired of getting "Out of the Office" replies to e-mail, you can have the rule wizard delete these messages (or you can move them to a folder and check them later). Similarly, you can search for "XXX" or "Work at Home for $$$" in the text or the subject line and ship these messages off to the delete box. In "Outlook Express," you can also apply a new rule directly to a message you are reading by going to "Message," and immediately make an unwelcome correspondent, a blocked sender.

Over three billion e-mail messages are sent every day. In many ways e-mail has become the new office water cooler or coffee maker. We need to manage this vast flow of communication more efficiently. Using the tools of built-in software and the techniques we applied to paper mail will help us re-gain control over our e-mail.