



no more
inbox madness

Quick Tips

1. Try to process email only once every hour or two and don't leave the email client open.
2. Immediately delete as many messages as possible.
3. Archive messages that don't require a response but that you may need to keep.
4. Respond to any messages that can be answered in two minutes or less.
5. Create a separate folder for messages to be responded to later and another for messages that require an action.
6. Deal with messages in folders in short bursts through the day.
7. Keep messages and responses as brief as possible.
8. Remove yourself from mailing lists.
9. Create rules to have client emails highlighted in a certain colour and also for suppliers.
10. Create an email address for all newsletter subscriptions.

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Inbox Zero: Less Stress, Guaranteed

Email overwhelm happens to the best of us, with most of your communications arriving via inbox, quickly making it a stressful place.

Is your inbox littered with unread, un-acted upon emails, many with deadlines that have already passed? You kid yourself into thinking this is some kind of “to-do” list, but in reality, you’re just avoiding having to deal with it, because you simply don’t know where to start.

With legitimate emails that need a response? Clients, potential clients, joint venture partners, and dozens of others contact you through email, and if you don’t keep a clean inbox, sooner or later something is going to slip through the cracks, and you’ll lose a valuable opportunity.

Ask anyone who’s suffered from inbox overload and gone on to embrace a cleaner inbox and they’ll tell you how freeing it can be. Suddenly, you’re no longer a slave to your email. You don’t waste time every day searching for that one email you know you need to answer but can’t find. You don’t have to ask clients to re-send information. Best of all, you stop dreading that first onslaught of emails in the morning.

Yes, you are back in control.

Let’s start by mapping out a plan and creating a manageable system

Clean up day, three options:

- 1. Will you simply delete everything so you can start fresh?**
- 2. Will you block off a few hours to carefully scan and sort your current emails?**
- 3. Will you use your email client filters to automatically file what you have?**

All three methods work, but if you have thousands of emails in your inbox, you might just want to decide that anything before, say, last month is going in the trash. Let’s face it, if you haven’t answered that email by now, it’s probably no longer relevant.

If you only have a few hundred emails to get through, then using filters or a manual sort method will probably work for you.

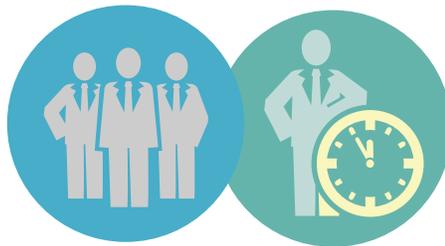
Start with the obvious dead weight: advertisements, junk, marketing emails you don’t care about, and email from your mailing list subscriptions can be deleted on the spot. The same can (generally) be said about email from friends and family, notifications of comments to moderate, Facebook messages, and LinkedIn connection requests. Highlight them all, and click the delete button.

Next, look for emails from current and prospective customers. Move them to a folder called “Reply To” or something similar, so they’re out of your way but still close at hand, you’ll deal with those later.

Finally, take a look at what’s left. Chances are there’s not much, and you can deal with them on an individual basis.

Once your inbox is clean (or greatly reduced) you can go back to the “Reply To” folder and begin answering, starting either with the most urgent messages or with the oldest. The important thing is not where you begin, but that you work through the entire folder. Do not let emails collect in this folder indefinitely. That will only move your problem from the inbox to another folder, when what you’re trying to do is resolve your stress, not hide it.

After cleaning up and deleting all those emails you will feel lighter and freer.



Paring Down: Multiple Email Addresses is the Road to Madness

You've probably worked with a client or two who has a separate email address for everything. Twitter@mydomain.com, facebook@mydomain.com, paypal@mydomain.com, info@mydomain.com, support@mydomain.com, personal@email.com ...The list goes on and on.

While on the surface that might look like a great idea, what often ends up happening is that emails get misdirected and the whole system breaks down. You buy an ebook and the seller adds your paypal@ email to his or her mailing list, where you continue to receive updates and other important information. Or you receive an inquiry from a potential customer to your support@ email. When he or she turns into a retainer client, he continues to use this email.

Or even worse – you accidentally respond to someone from the wrong address, moving the entire email trail into a mailbox in which you would never think to look for it. You'll waste hours searching for some bit of information, just because it's in the wrong inbox.

A Better Solution

One email address. Two, at the most.

Now before you get all tangled up in how you might accomplish this feat, consider how much simpler would your life be if every email came and went from the same address. For most people, that would significantly simplify their lives.

So think about which emails get the most traffic, and which you could conceivably do away with. Rarely used addresses, or those used only for third-party notifications can simply be deleted. You'll just need to update your notifications email at Twitter, Facebook, and other services.

Addresses that do receive email can easily be forwarded right from your hosting account, so you can collect all your email in one spot.

Gmail's Answer to Multiple Email Addresses

If you're not comfortable ditching all those extra addresses just yet, Gmail has an answer for you. Your Gmail account comes built with the ability to send and receive email from up to five other POP3 accounts. That means that you can use a single Gmail interface to collect all your mail, and you can even set it up to reply to those messages using the same email address that received them. So you won't confuse your clients by responding to their email from sookiebear@gmail.com instead of your.professional.name@gmail.com.

This is especially helpful if you set up an email for every domain you own, but the email address itself gets very little mail. Or if you like the idea of having a PayPal address for accounting purposes, but don't want to have to log in to yet another email server (such as WebMail).

Even if you do decide to go the Gmail route, it's still a good idea to pare your emails down to the bare necessities.

When you started your online business, it probably seems like a good idea (and maybe even necessary for organization) to have lots of email addresses. Now that you're busy, though, all those mailboxes can easily become more of a pain to deal with than you ever imagined. And when it comes to getting your email under control, the first step is often deleting those unnecessary addresses.



Filters and Folders: Automation Makes Productivity Painless

Imagine logging into your email and being able to see at a glance what needs attention right now, all the information related to your current projects, and a list of items you put away to read later. How much time would that save – just because you wouldn't have to search for that email a potential client sent last week?

Plenty, you can be sure. And all it takes is a little setup of folders and filters (or rules, as some email clients call them).

Planning Your Folder Setup

Every modern email host and client supports some kind of folder structure. In Outlook and Mac Mail, for example, you can create folders within (or outside) your main “Inbox” folder. The same is true for free email providers such as Yahoo and Hotmail. Gmail goes their own way and offers “labels” instead. Labels act like folders, without cluttering up the interface. A few minutes with the help files for your email provider of choice should give you all the information you need to set up folders within your account.

Your business structure and the way you prefer to work will determine how you set up your folders. For example, you might want to create a folder for each client, for each project, or nested folders for both. You might even want folders titled “Requires Action” (for emails that contain to-do items) and “Requires Response” (for emails you need to answer).

Other helpful folders might be “Read Later” for newsletters you want to read, “Buy This” for sales emails that contain products you're considering, and “Receipts” for things you've already purchased.

Using Automation Rules

Once you have your folder structure set up, it's time to add some rules to automatically file your incoming mail. That way, you don't have to open the same email multiple times – you only have to look at it when you're ready to work on that project or you're looking for something to read.

Like folders, most modern email systems offer automation rules. You can set up rules to move incoming mail to a folder, flag it for easy location, or even delete it. Rules can be based on a number of different criteria, including sender address, subject, keywords, who it was sent to, and whether or not it contains an attachment.

The easiest way to set up rules (or filters, as they're known in Gmail) is to build each one based on a piece of email you receive. For example, if you receive an email from a client to your Gmail

box, and you want to file all future emails from her to the folder you've created, you would simply open the email, click the "More" button, and choose "Filter messages like these." Then just follow the prompts. All future emails that match your filter criteria will be treated the same way.

Most other email systems have similar features. Again, a few minutes with the help files will have you creating rules to handle all your incoming mail. And once you've got your folders and filters set up, your email inbox will be a much cleaner, less stressful place.

Just Do It: Guilt-Free Email Outsourcing

It feels a little...weird, doesn't it? The thought of letting someone else read (and maybe even respond to) your email might feel a bit like an invasion of privacy, but it might just be the thing that saves your sanity when you're facing email overload every morning.

And you don't have to allow your assistant to read all your email – just a few select accounts.

Private vs. Business Email

Before you decide to outsource your email management, it's a good idea to separate your personal from your business accounts. Your personal email address is the one you'll give to your friends and family, your kid's school, your bank, and anyone else who might send you either personal or confidential information.

Your business email is the one you'll use for your help desk, affiliate programs, and other non-personal information. This is the one you'll give to your assistant to read and respond to, if necessary. He or she should know enough about your business to be able to respond appropriately in most cases, but also know that anything she can't handle should be forwarded to you for a response.

Using a Help Desk

Information product sellers, online retailers, and even coaches might find it useful to set up a help desk. This is a great way to filter and organize conversations, particularly as they relate to products and customer service. Not only that, but you can easily have your assistant monitor the desk, relieving you of the responsibility.

One of the most popular options is ZenDesk, which is a bargain at just \$25-30 per year. It's a hosted platform, meaning there is nothing to install. Plus it allows for email piping, so the sending of an email to a designated address automatically creates a ticket. ZenDesk is super simple to set up and use, and will definitely help clear up your email inbox.

If you do decide to use a help desk – regardless of which one you choose – you'll want to set up some systems for monitoring and maintaining it. At the very least, you'll want someone to be in charge of all incoming tickets. That person is responsible for making sure that all tickets are answered in a timely manner, and that relevant information is added to the FAQ page. You may want to work out a system by which help requests are escalated to you (or a project manager) in case your help desk person isn't able to answer, or doesn't know how to respond to a particular request.

Digging out from under a pile of email can be tough, but if you get some help, you'll be well on your way to an empty inbox, and that's a great place to be.

Prioritize and Systemize: Or Why That Little "Unread" Number will Drive You Crazy

How often do you check your email? Every hour? Every few minutes? Or is it every time that little “unread” number pops up?

If you suffer from email overload, that little number can make you crazy – and plenty unproductive as well. But a little discipline and a good plan can help you tame your email and regain some of your sanity.

Better Email Settings for a More Productive Work Day

First, do you really need to check your email every five minutes? That’s the default setting for a lot of email clients, but that kind of instant receipt is almost always unnecessary. A better idea is to set your email client to only grab email on demand, meaning if you don’t ask for your emails to be downloaded it won’t happen.

If you can’t (or won’t) rely on manual downloading of emails, at least turn off the “unread” notification. That way you won’t be tempted to rush off to read every email that comes in, even when you’re up to your eyeballs in a project.

Ideally, you want to limit checking of emails to three times per day: in the morning, in the afternoon, and at the end of the day. But here’s the thing – you have to “process” those emails at the same time. You can’t let them sit around to answer later, or that defeats the whole purpose.

A Systematic Approach to Email Processing

What do you do when you open your email client? If you’re like most people, you browse the subjects, open the most interesting ones first, make a decision about what needs to happen with it, then move on to the next.

This is a serious waste of time because you end up opening, reading, and making decisions about the same emails again and again, every time you look at your inbox. There’s a better way.

For every email you open, immediately decide if it requires action or not. If not, either file it (if it contains information you might need later) or trash it. If the email requires action – whether it’s a to-do item for a project or simply needs an answer – you have three choices: do it now, do it later, or get someone else to do it.

If it’s going to take just a couple of minutes (i.e. you just need to write a two line response), then do it and trash the email. If it will take longer than that, add it to your to-do list for later, then trash the email. If you want someone else to do it, forward it on.

No matter which choice you made, the email does not stay in your inbox. It's either filed, done, or added to a to-do list (yours or someone else's).

Do that for each email you receive, every time you open your inbox, and you'll never again have to face the clutter of an overflowing inbox.

Will it take some time and discipline to build that habit? You bet, but the result – no more stressing over emails, and no more wasted time searching for an email you've read before but failed to act on – is well worth the time it will take to re-train your brain about email.



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