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Jeff Davidson: Breathing Space

Management by Default: Over-relying on Email

Email: What a concept and what a dilemma. The benefit of email to association executives, as well as everyone else, is abundantly clear. Email, however, can be devastating if used unwisely. Some people constantly check their email all day long. Some incessantly send mail merely to receive mail. Some spend time actually pondering the spam they receive.

Who among us does not receive more email than he or she can possibly respond to? By some estimates, the typical association manager today receives 150 to 190 emails per day!

Death by Email Overload

Despite software filters and ISP crackdowns, mass delivery from spammers has risen dramatically. Data from Jupiter Communications reveals that there are far more email accounts in the U.S. than there are people. Spammers know this and know how to spread their junk everywhere.

Resist any temptation to respond to spam! Never respond even to request removal from the spammer's list. If you do, you only confirm that your email address is active, which will make you a future target. Maddening, isn't it?

Quick tips:

Send any spam messages you receive to your ISP's abuse account, along with the source code from the original spam message.

- Avoid posting your primary email address anywhere on the Internet.
- For secondary email addresses, choose one deep in the alphabet. Spammers' lists run alphabetically. When an ISP successfully cuts off a spammer, addresses at the end of the list get spared.
- Choose a complex email address. Hatti36@yahoo.com, for instance, will receive more spam than gfW3y68@hotmail.com.
- Be selective when registering online. Different websites have widely differing policies about the privacy of your email address. When in doubt, don't register.

Whenever you receive email with lots of X's, all capitals, or excessive claims, don't waste a picosecond reading it. One writer commented, "You can safely bleep anything that has lots of exclamation marks, assorted promises and come-ons, or if it looks like it was written by someone who pants for a living."

Even without spam, you're still probably receiving dozens of emails per day. That's quite a bit of verbiage. To effectively manage your time, keep your job, and have a life, how do you handle email?

When composing messages that you intend to have read, offer a vibrant subject lines so that the receiver will read them. If you have trouble thinking one up, wait until you have first composed your message. Then peruse what you've written, and voila! Two or three words (usually together) will jump out at you, and there's your subject.

Old Email Never Dies or Fades Away

The Financial Times of London reported that few email users realize that "Deleting a controversial email message from a desktop PC does not always get rid of it." Messages can be stored on your Internet server or your network server.

Treat any email you ever send as having the potential to revisit you! If you write an email that can land you in trouble, expect it to come back and haunt you.

While Offline, Optimize Your Time Online

Early in the morning, before downloading new messages, the "administrivia" that you handle often enhances your productivity in both sending and receiving email. This includes arranging your inboxes and composing thoughts before going online.

As with all good writing, it's prudent to park outbound email message for a while and revisit them before sending. With virtually all software and service providers, you have the option to store an email message as a "draft message" for later retrieval as desired.

Also, those who check their email every spare moment they have, are often not doing such a great job. Avoid that trap, by enhancing your offline effectiveness.

Too Fast for Your Own Good?

Have you ever angered or confused anyone because of an email? If you think the answer is "no," think again.

Unless worded carefully, emails can seem impersonal, cold, even abrasive. It's not that you intended to ruffle any feathers, but in the haste of instant communication, ruffling happens! As a good rule of thumb, before sending an email consider the following guidelines as viable reasons to call rather than email:
when the message is...

- intricate
- personal or emotional in nature
- completely novel
- requires extended clarification
- seeks approval
- may have profound impact on the recipient

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