

# Reduce Email Overload



task  
procrastination  
Inbox  
distraction  
email ping pong  
addiction  
to-do's  
action  
delete  
volume  
work  
stress  
interruptions  
Inbox chaos  
email  
Overload

## Smart Email Practices

How to develop your own personal email strategy

by Jani Murphy

[www.emailsmart.com.au](http://www.emailsmart.com.au)

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I hope you enjoy reading this e-book and if you have any questions, please email me - [jani@emailsmart.com.au](mailto:jani@emailsmart.com.au).

M: 0438 699 153

E: [jani@emailsmart.com.au](mailto:jani@emailsmart.com.au)

W: [www.emailsmart.com.au](http://www.emailsmart.com.au)

A: PO Box 1781

Subiaco WA 6904

# CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION:** Take Control of Your Inbox

**CHAPTER 1:** Minimize Email Disruption

**CHAPTER 2:** Operate From Empty

**CHAPTER 3:** Deal with the Backlog

**CHAPTER 4:** Email Filing Principles

**SUMMARY:** In Summary

## TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR INBOX

### Where are we at?

Email overload is a problem that affects nearly everyone that uses email. Do you suffer from email overload? If not, then consider – *is the volume of email you receive going to decrease?* The answer is - **No!**

### Some interesting statistics

- Email traffic is growing at a rapid rate. The Gartner Group predicts growth rates in email volume of 40% per annum.
- Email is now used for over 60% of internal and external communication in organisations.
- In a survey conducted by Microsoft in 2006, 66% of people surveyed said email has become a problem.
- According to the Radicati Group, by 2012 we will be sending **419 billion emails per day**.

So it seems that we are feeling more and more stressed in the workplace around email and with email volume constantly increasing, we have some motivation to gain control over our ever expanding Inboxes.

### What is email overload?

Email overload is usually measured in terms of volume; however one person receiving 40 emails per day might feel overloaded whereas another person receiving the same volume might not.

A better way to measure email overload is to think about the number of emails in your Inbox currently awaiting attention of some kind.

So, how many emails do you have in your Inbox needing attention and what sort of emails are they?

## TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR INBOX

Why is this number typically so high? What sorts of emails do you keep in your inbox?

- Memory jogger emails about some follow-up action you need to take?
- Emails that really should be filed or deleted?
- In-progress correspondence?
- Reference emails?
- Emails that you just can't work out where else to put them?
- Newsletters/eazines?

If you're nodding your head at these points then you know why you have an overloaded Inbox.

### Overcoming email overload

How can you reduce this accumulation of emails in your Inbox?

You need an email strategy, a way of managing your email that puts you in control of your Inbox so that you can focus on doing the work that matters.

Two commonly accepted best practice email strategies are:

- Operate from an empty Inbox.
- Check for emails at regular intervals – no more than 3 to 4 times a day!

Remember, email is not your work, it's the way your work comes to you.

## MINIMIZE EMAIL DISRUPTION

### How frequently do you check your email?

One of the main ways that email can impair your productivity is by breaking your concentration.

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

Try the following:

- Check your email at regular intervals, no more than 3 to 4 times a day.
- Schedule email checks in your Calendar as recurring appointments to reinforce the practice that it's at these times only that you check your email.

### How to minimize disruption

In addition to checking your email at regular intervals, there are a number of steps you can take to help minimize the disruption factor of email:

- **Don't constantly display your Inbox on your screen.** Why have your Inbox, one of your major sources of interruption, displayed on your screen constantly? It only serves as a distraction from your real work. Email is not your work, it's the way your work comes to you.
- **When you're not checking your email, display your Calendar folder instead.** Also, if your email software allows you to, make your Calendar the folder that displays each time you run your email program.
- **Turn off email notifications.** Don't let email distract you at random – you'll lose time and productivity. Make your email silent.

## MINIMIZE EMAIL DISRUPTION

- **Add a note to your signature block.** Let people know that you check your email at regular intervals during the day so if they want to contact you urgently, try the telephone. (Radical thought!)

*For example, "I check my emails 3 to 4 times daily and respond promptly. Please call me on the above number if you need to speak to me urgently."*

- **Make the first hour an email free zone.** Start the day in charge and make the first hour at work an email free. Devote this time to your most critical task. The energy you'll feel from accomplishing it will give you a lift all day long.

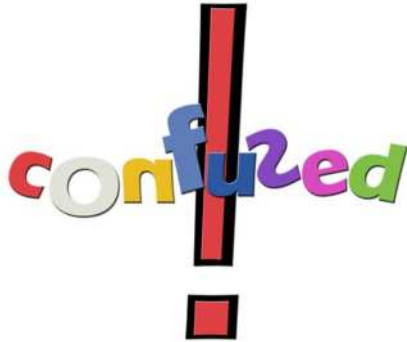
If the nature of your work means that an email check first thing is critical, try the scan approach and do a quick check of your Inbox to see if anything requires your urgent attention.

You can then move the email free zone to the first available hour after you've handled any immediate requests.



## OPERATE FROM EMPTY

### Why operate from an empty Inbox?



When you have hundreds or even thousands of emails in your Inbox, emails you need to follow-up can be forgotten in the avalanche.

An overflowing Inbox can be a source of stress, constantly reminding you of the number of emails awaiting your attention.

### How can operating from an empty Inbox help?

- An accumulation of emails in your Inbox can be a constant source of distraction.
- An empty Inbox will give you a sense of achievement at the end of the day, knowing that you have dealt with everything that required your attention.

### Reduce your Inbox volume

Given that email volume is continually on the increase, anything you can do to decrease the volume of email that hits your Inbox has got to be helpful.

## OPERATE FROM EMPTY

Try the following:

- **Be less responsive to emails.** If you always respond within minutes (or even seconds!) of receiving an email, people will use email more and more to communicate with you and use other means of communication less and less - a sure way to increase the volume of email you receive.
- **The more emails you send, the more emails you receive.** If you want to receive less email, send less email. Use other forms of communication. Before sending an email, ask yourself “Is email the most appropriate communication channel to achieve this outcome?”
- **Use rules to filter incoming emails.** Create rules to filter newsletter/ezines etc out of your Inbox. These types of emails can be read at a later time.

### The Email Pipeline and the 4P’s

When you check your emails at regular intervals, you need a way of handling the volume of emails in your Inbox at each email check.

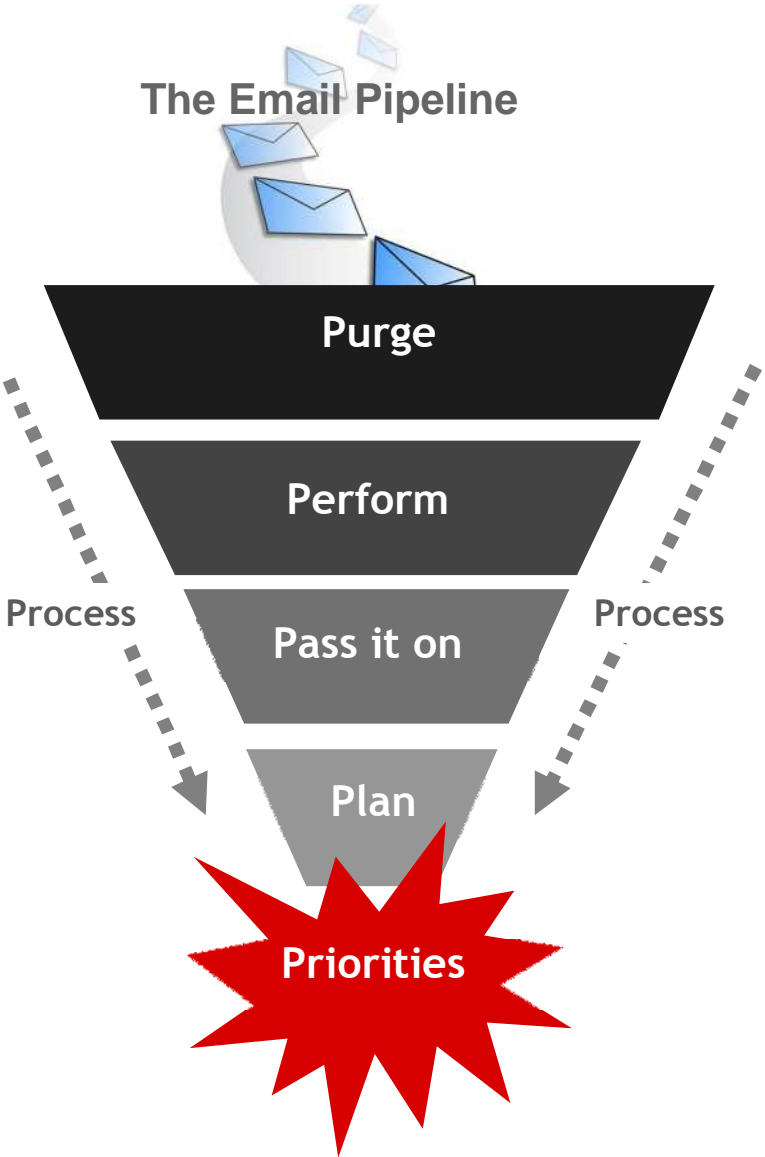
Use Email Smart’s Email Pipeline model and the 4P’s to decide what to do with each email.

Crucial to the success of using the 4P’s is to touch an email once only. When you read an email, **make a decision about what you need to do with it.**

Don’t start the digital equivalent of paper shuffling - email-shuffling. It’s a real time-waster.

OPERATE FROM EMPTY

The Email Pipeline



During your email checks, as you read each email, ask yourself whether you can:

THE 4P'S OF THE EMAIL PIPELINE	
<b>PURGE IT?</b>	If having read the email, you don't need to keep it.
<b>PERFORM IT?</b>	If it's only going to take you 2 – 3 minutes.
<b>PUSH IT?</b>	If what needs to be done is best done by someone else, turn the email into a task or and push it on or forward the email.
<b>PLAN IT?</b>	If what you need to do will take longer than 2 – 3 minutes, turn the email into a task and decide when you are going to do it.

## OPERATE FROM EMPTY

### Purge

On average people delete 50% of their emails. To help you decide whether or not to delete an email, ask yourself:

- Can I get this information elsewhere?
- Will I refer to this information in the next 3 months?
- Am I required to keep it?

### Perform

If you need to take some kind of action after reading an email **AND** if that action will take you 2 to 3 minutes or less, do it immediately and then delete or file the email.

***The email must be removed from your Inbox after you have completed the action.***

### Push

If what needs to be done is best done by someone else, the task should be pushed or passed to that person.

A task can be pushed by forwarding the email with an explanation of the job to be done. If you want to follow it up, make a note on your own to-do list to check on the progress of the task.

***Once the task has been pushed, the email must be filed or deleted.***

### Plan

If you need to take some kind of action that will take longer than 2 to 3 minutes, make a note of the task that needs to be done on your to-do list and decide when you are going to do it.

***After you have recorded the details of the action, file or delete the email.***

## DEAL WITH THE BACKLOG

### Crucial to Success

The key to achieving an empty Inbox is to start with a clean slate. You must deal with the backlog in your Inbox. Move everything in your Inbox into a separate folder.

If you think about the emails that have accumulated in your Inbox, most of them will simply need filing or deleting – these can stay in the backlog folder.

However, your more recent emails may require action. These actions must be **planned** for i.e. make a note of the action and when you are going to do it on your to-do list.

### Starting with a Clean Slate

To start with a clean slate:

- **Create a folder called “\*Backlog”.** Move the contents of your Inbox into this folder.

- **4P your “\*Backlog” folder.** Allow a short period of time, say 15 minutes a day, to 4P the contents of your “\*Backlog” folder. If you don’t have time to 4P the entire contents of the folder, you must find time to identify those emails requiring action. These should be planned or pushed. The remainder can simply stay in the folder.
- **Rename the folder to “ZFiling”.** Once you have identified and planned or pushed all emails requiring action, rename the “\*Filing folder” to “ZFiling” so that the folder displays at the end of the folder list.
- **Apply the 4P’s to incoming emails at each email check.** Having emptied your Inbox, the 4P’s can now be applied to incoming emails at each email check.

## EMAIL FILING PRINCIPLES

### Less is More

When you set up a folder structure for filing your emails:

- **Remember less is more.** Create broad groups of folders rather than more specific groups i.e. having fewer folders covering broader groups of emails will make your filing easier.
- **Searching is also much simpler** with less folders covering broader groups of email.
- **Create one top level folder** and then create your folder structure under it. The folder structure can then be expanded and collapsed as required.

### Facilitate Filing

- **Change the sort order.** Sorting emails by subject for example, will allow you to easily file emails in the same conversation thread.
- **Process the sent email at the time you send it.** Apply the 4P's to the email in your sent folder immediately after sending.
- **Create a Reading folder.** Newsletters and ezines that are going to take longer than 2 to 3 minutes to read and don't require any follow-up should be filed in a Reading folder. Set aside regular times in your Calendar to you review the contents of this folder.

## Staying in Control

To stay in control of your Inbox follow best practice processes for managing your email:

- Minimize email disruption.
- Operate each day from an empty Inbox.
- During email checks use the Email Pipeline model and the 4P's.

**Purge?** If having read the email, you don't need to keep it.

**Perform?** If it's only going to take you 2 – 3 minutes.

**Push?** If what needs to be done is best done by someone else.

**Plan?** If what you need to do will take longer than 2 – 3 minutes.

- **Deal with your backlog.** Crucial to the success of your new email management strategy is to start from a clean slate.
- **Less is more.** Create a simple folder structure that allows you to file quickly and search easily.

*For a detailed, how-to explanation of the processes to follow if you want to take control of your Inbox, download [How to Empty your Inbox using Outlook from www.emailsmart.com.au/products](http://www.emailsmart.com.au/products).*

## EMAIL SMART SERVICES

### Email Productivity and Effectiveness Audit

An Email Productivity and Effectiveness Audit will assist in measuring the impact of the existing organisational email culture – habits and practices – on individual productivity and well-being in your organisation.

The audit covers:

- Knowledge of company email policies
- Email overload and its impact
- Frequency of email checks
- Priority of email as a communication tool
- Organisational email culture issues

At the completion of the audit process you will have a clear understanding of the email issues in your organisation, the cost to your organisation of these issues; and how to address them.

### Email Protocol Program

Daily email habits can cost organisations hundreds of man hours each week. When you implement an Email Protocol Program, you are taking a proactive approach and setting new guidelines for effective and productive email behaviour in the workplace.

The program consists of four distinct phases:

- Audit Phase
- Preparation Phase
- Implementation Phase
- Review Phase

Expected outcomes

- A reduction in overall email volume of between 10 to 20%
- A time-savings of up to 1.5 hours per person per day
- A change in employee behaviour from reactive to proactive
- An improvement in employee clarity and focus with people feeling less stressed and more in control

## EMAIL SMART SERVICES

### Email Productivity Boost Workshops

Do you feel frustrated trying to stay on top of an ever increasing volume of daily email? Do you find that too often, tasks slip through the cracks? Do you spend most of your time answering emails instead of getting on with your real job? Is your Inbox a source of stress and frustration?

The Email Productivity Boost workshop will show you how to overcome these problems and introduce you to a way of working will allow you to get more done in your working day.

You will learn:

- How to A-C-T to reduce email volume
- How to A-C-T to increase email value
- How to minimise the disruption factor of email
- Simple processes for emptying your Inbox every day
- Tips for creating a functional email filing system
- How to plan and proactively manage your email work
- How to manage ideas for future projects

### Executive Coaching

The Executive Coaching Program is designed to show you as a busy executive, how to transform your relationship with email and put in place best practice email processes.

The program offers the opportunity to:

- Examine your current email practices under the guidance of an email strategy expert
- Develop new email strategies to combat email overload
- Establish email habits that will give you back at least 45 minutes in your working day and reduce your email volume

The coaching program is conducted over 4 weeks and incorporates the following:

- An Inbox health check
- An Inbox clarity coaching
- A review session to finalise processes
- A phone wrap up session