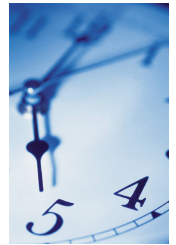


# *Solutions for Success*

W o r k p l a c e P r o d u c t i v i t y S p e c i a l i s t s



## **The Challenge of Mastering Email in the Modern Workplace**

Solutions for Success have been studying the impact of email on workplace productivity for the past decade. Our specialisation in this particular aspect of work-life occurred as a result of our experience in 1:1 coaching sessions to support time management training – more and more of these sessions were devoted to addressing email. Clients kept telling us ***‘our biggest time management problem is email’***.

Email is now a major driver of communication and workload in most organisations. It is also cited as one of the biggest time wasters in the modern workplace! Modern email programs make it easy to send large amounts of email and also to organise and prioritise incoming messages and workload. As a result, many report that

***Email is the biggest time waster and source of frustration in modern business life***

It is central to many of the functions of modern business and a surprisingly high proportion of business communications and workload-sharing rely on this technology. Yet, as email volumes increase exponentially, along with the expectations and demands that accompany it, the time available to process them all remains unchanged.

Our research has found that most users have grasped the former without mastering the latter. For example, everyone knows how to send ‘cc’ messages but few know how to apply rules to sort the wheat from the chaff.

The causes of email overload extend beyond individual skills (or lack of them) and into group interaction. With the majority of email volumes being generated within an organisation, there is great scope to discuss (and improve upon) agreed ‘best practices’ for using this ubiquitous communication tool.

In light of the complex behavioural issues, simple telling users to curb their email sending is not sufficient – a comprehensive, management-driven process is also necessary. It has to delve beyond simple exhortation into actual group behaviour to identify the causes of current practices and define changes needed to improve them.

The following three solutions aim to reduce information and email overload by educating employees to adopt new behaviours, thereby modifying the prevailing organisational culture.

### **1: Email Mastery**

### **2: Smart Email Practices**

### **3: Awareness Drive**

Depending on the program chosen and extent of implementation, organisations can expect;

- a **25-40% saving in the time and salary cost** currently expended on email practices
- this equates to a saving of **\$6913 to \$11,062** and **17-27 days** of productivity per person per year.★

The following pages provide an outline of each of these solutions.

★Based on 220 x 7.5 hour working days per year

## 1: Email Mastery (eMastery)

An organisation-wide program to address behaviour patterns, interpersonal interactions and technical skills in one complete, company-wide drive.

### Program Format

This is achieved by working from the top down and implementing the following actions at each hierarchical level in the organisation;

- **eProductivity Benchmarking Audit** – to identify underlying issues and benchmark against other organisations
- **Awareness Training** - A short presentation describing the nature, damage, causes and solutions of information & email overload, including review of Audit results. This is followed by a discussion with management team to agree on expected content & outcomes for the training to follow.
- **Skills Training** – designed to enhance users' proficiency in using their email software
- Program of **follow up and support** – designed to remind and reinforce the program content and maximise its implementation. One on one Coaching provided by external consultant to management team and then by managers (or dedicated 'champion') to staff in their various departments
- **Post program survey** – to compare with pre-program survey and measure/assess the improvements gained by this program.

The program commences when top level management are approached and asked to 'buy in' to the program, ratify the management expectations and commit to their roles as drivers of the program.

After the managers at one level have undertaken the actions above, they each champion the program within their own department or sub-organisation, leading their staff through the various steps and so on throughout the organisation, in 'waterfall' fashion.

Obviously, the implementation needs to be tailored to the specific culture and expectations of the organisation and to the detailed aspects of information overload within it. That's where an organisation-wide pre-program eProductivity Benchmarking Audit will help identify the specific issues to be addressed in the program.

### Delivery Methods

The skills training can be delivered by way of;

- **1:1 coaching**  
This option is especially relevant for senior executives (possibly along with their PA/EA), who may not need the same amount of time to grasp the rationale explained in a group workshop and/or may be reluctant to 'confess' their struggles with email in a group environment.

- **Training workshops**

Nothing beats instructor-led classroom training when it comes to imparting email etiquette guidelines. Having a professional trainer deliver these best practices (and the rationale behind them), along with opportunity to discuss them in a peer group setting, can be very effective. Obviously this solution can be expensive (as with all training) but it also provides significant ROI (like all training). The temptation to simply provide written materials for employees to read is always there but should be resisted. Engagement, interaction and implementation will achieve vastly superior results.

- **Web-based training**

Computer or web based training can impart the essential aspects of email etiquette and skills. This is obviously less expensive than instructor-led workshops and, designed well, can be acceptably effective. However, it can be difficult to ensure staff learn effectively using this format – they may decline to use it all or use it in a cursory manner without learning much. Ideally, this format is best suited as a follow up and ongoing resources to support an initial classroom intervention.

- **Various combinations of the above**

### Program Impact

Intel piloted this program (entitled “Your Time”) amongst some 1200 employees and a web-based survey after the program revealed the following results;

- 70% participated in the program
- 80% viewed it as beneficial
- 71% reported improvement in their own email effectiveness
- 63% saw improved quality of email received
- 75% of managers perceived an increase in email effectiveness for their groups

A key factor in the success of the program at any level is the degree of commitment of the manager leading any given target group. The ‘waterfall’ model harnesses managers throughout the company to drive the content, which can be delivered and monitored by an external expert in this field and/or an internal change agent(s) trained up in the methodology.

## 2: Smart Email Practices

A lightweight program designed to change email behaviour by disseminating a series of ‘Smart Email Practices’ across the organisation over time.

Each resolution defines a simple, specific change in the management expectations and group behaviours regarding email usage. For example:

- The 4D method for processing email
- Implementing the ‘cc’ rule
- Templated subject lines
- Chart of when to use email or not

These can be complemented with an employee 'suggestion drive' (with a prize) to collect additional information overload techniques. The combination of periodic communications and employee engagement achieves the desired awareness with a minimal investment of resources.

However, without follow up action, the impact will soon be lost. To prevent this, the program must be maintained to protect its lessons from being forgotten. As new employees join the organisation, they need to be acquainted with the expectations of the 'Smart Resolutions' and existing employees need to be reminded of them as well.

The 'Smart Email Practices' program can be deployed through the organisation by whatever existing communication channels are available (eg: internal newsletter, intranet portal).

### **Program Impact**

Intel's implementation of this program (known as "Smart Resolutions") to over 7000 participants showed favourable results when pre and post surveys were completed, showing:

- 67% rated the program's importance as high or very high
- 53% had changed their behaviour as a result of the program
- time devoted to email had been reduced
- the number of employees spending more than 20 hours per week on email decreased from 37% to 15%
- the percentage of unnecessary emails (and associated time) were significantly reduced

## **3: Awareness Drive**

A one-time seminar or presentation delivered to employees describing the nature, damage, causes and solutions of information overload. This would typically be delivered by an outside expert in this field.

This sort of presentation, while far from a comprehensive solution, can appeal to organisations that may be reluctant to invest in a more comprehensive, larger scale program. It creates awareness, gives staff cause to think about the problem and many of them will adopt some of the practical ideas to improve their situation.

Audience feedback for this sort of presentation is favourable and feedback received months or even years later shows a lasting change in some people's approach to managing their email.

### **Deploy '10 Commandments' style Reference Card<sup>1</sup>**

A list of 10 'best practice' guidelines and solutions for using email is disseminated to all current and new employees. This focused list of best practices is easy to grasp and a physical reference card can be kept in constant sight as a reminder. Using some branding in the design of the cards helps to extend the awareness of the campaign as multiple copies of the reference card are evident throughout the office.

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<sup>1</sup> This reference card would be utilised in all three initiatives

However, deploying these cards by themselves, without an explanation and understanding of the rationale behind them, could lose much of the desired impact. Therefore, these cards are best utilised as a component of a larger program (ie: 'Email Mastery' or 'Smart Email Practices').

Once the 'Ten Commandments' have been agreed upon, they should be printed on a single reference card, complete with program and/or company branding, logo and imaging. The cards should be given to all employees upon launch of the program and to all new hires as they join the organisation (as part of an orientation kit if one exists).

The concept of 'Ten Commandments' is strongly entrenched in western culture but whether or not to entitle the reference card with 'Ten Commandments' should be determined according to the corporate culture and any possible religious sensitivities.

There could be a temptation to make the card a PDF document and allow staff to print it out for themselves. This is generally less than ideal as many employees will not make the effort to do it while others may end up with lower quality printouts. Notwithstanding this, the list should also be posted on any intranet site for on-line reading.

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We at Solutions for Success would be happy to discuss partnering with you to deliver some or all of the above solutions for your people. Meanwhile, if you have any questions about this report, please contact me direct to discuss – whatever I can do, I'm here to help!

All the best!



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