

5 Highly Effective Emails Habits



Remember that email is supposed to be a tool for getting a job done? Instead, for many users email seems to have hijacked the working day, leaving them with less and less time to do their jobs. An overflowing mailbox can turn into a nightmare causing stress and reducing productivity. For those that want to regain control of their mailbox, here are five highly effective email habits accompanied by five practical Outlook¹ tips.

1. Set specific time for email

Work out how often you need to check your email and allocate specific “email time” during the day. Do not allow emails to interrupt activities where you need to stay focused. Interruptions slow you down and decrease productivity.

Tip No 1 Desktop Alerts notify you when an email is received by displaying briefly a pop up message. To turn them off, go to **Tools » Options**, on the Preferences tab select **Email Options » Advanced Email Options**, remove the tick next to **Display a New Mail Desktop Alert**.

2. Keep emails short and to the point

Before you start churning out emails, consider whether email is the most effective medium. If you need to write a short novel to get your point across, it is probably better to pick up the phone. Keep email content short and to the point. Let the recipient know what is expected of them and any deadlines.

Tip No 2 Voting Buttons are useful for keeping track of responses in a multiple choice scenario. For example, if your recipients need to take a vote on something, open a new message, go to the **Options** tab, click on **Use Voting Buttons**. From the menu that opens, make a selection, e.g. **Yes; No**. Selecting **Custom**, gives the option to personalise the names for the voting buttons, e.g. the names of possible venues. The buttons are not visible in the message being composed. However the recipients will have a **Vote** button on the Message tab.

3. Manage your Inbox regularly

If you have forgotten what an empty Inbox looks (and even better, feels like!) set some rules and stick to them. When you open a new email, there are four possible actions: delete (don't become an email hoarder), archive (in case you need to refer to it later), quick reply (less than four sentences), mark for action (place on your to-do list). Move onto the next email.

See Tip No 3 Email reminders are useful for example when you have a completion deadline or need to come back to an email at a later date. They can be set up directly from an email message². Highlight the message and right-click on the message Flag icon, select **Add Reminder**. Choose the date and time and click **OK**.

4. Don't copy the world

More than 294 billion emails are sent each day³. How many of them are yours? Send emails only to recipients that need to know. Just because someone else decided to copy the world, does not mean that you should also hit “Reply All”. If you get copied in on a lot of emails, start filtering them into a separate folder.

Tip No4 To filter emails where you have been CC's, click on **Tools » Rules and Alerts**. On the menu that

appears click on **New Rule**. On the Rules Wizard, under **Start with a blank rule**, highlight **Check messages when they arrive » Next**. In the list of conditions, place a tick next to **where my name is in the Cc box**. Click **Next** and choose an action. If you want the message to be deleted, select **delete it**. Alternatively, you may want to file it in a folder in which case select **move it to the specified folder**. Click on **specified** and create or choose the folder followed by **OK**. Click on **Next** for further options or **Finish**.

5. Sort your emails automatically

Organising your emails in a meaningful and efficient way will make it easier to find them later. Based on criteria set by you, emails can be filed automatically to folders, auto-replies sent or specific actions can be initiated. For example, group emails together by project, make important senders stand out or send tasks to others.

Tip No 5 Let's learn how to file emails to a specific folder based on the subject content. In addition to the instructions in Tip No4 which are very similar, the easiest way to create a rule is by right-clicking on an already existing message that contains the criteria and selecting **Create Rule**. Tick the criteria to be checked when the message arrives, e.g. **Subject contains**. Tick **Move the item to the folder**, select the folder and click **OK**.

¹ Outlook 2007 and Outlook 2010. Some of the features discussed may also be available in Outlook 2003 but the instructions may vary.

² Works with Exchange, POP3 and .PST files

³ April 2010 statistics supplied by the Radicati Group.