

11 B@d Email Habits & How To Avoid Them

Email can be a fantastic business tool, but it can also become a productivity killer, a source of misunderstanding and a disruption to our work-life balance. Thankfully, there are ways to make email work better for everyone...

Sending a request for action to multiple people

It's tempting to send a request to multiple people in the hope that someone will pick it up and respond quickly. However, you're shifting responsibility for a co-ordinated response onto the recipients who are already busy. The likely outcome is that the email will be overlooked and will actually cause a delay.

Solution: Speak to someone and agree who is going to take responsibility. If required, follow this up with an email to confirm what has been agreed so all parties involved can refer back to it if necessary.

Jumping into Outlook every time a new email chimes

This is a clear productivity problem, and the chimes can be enough to distract your train of thought at any time.

Solution: If you can be strict with yourself to check your email regularly, then consider turning off the new email notifications in Outlook. This allows you to finish one task without interruption and then check emails before you start the next task.

Copying in lots of people

When you CC an email, you multiply the time it will take for everyone to read it. Often requests for comment or action are buried within the text, and the CC'ed recipients aren't sure if they can simply file the email or if they need to read it in depth.

Solution: CC-ing is fine as long as you follow some basic rules:

- No actions or response are expected from a CC'ed person. They have been copied in for information only.
- Only copy in people who really need to be included. CC-ing someone's manager is understandable, as they need oversight on activities, but CC-ing half the team plus managers and directors is probably overkill.
- Keep emails brief and to the point. Definitely don't copy people in on a decision process. A conference call or meeting is far better.

Brainstorming and collaborating with others

Do not send emails when you need to share ideas or brainstorm with others. Using Outlook will only increase the number of emails in everyone's inboxes and create a long email chain that most recipients will not read.

Solution: Use Microsoft Teams for working with others in and out of your team. You can share documents, arrange meetings and chat instantly with the people you want to work with on any particular topic, internal project, task, etc. Microsoft Teams can massively reduce internal email traffic.

Sending emails out of hours

Sending emails out of hours is disruptive for the recipients, and the temptation to read emails is strong once you know they are there. This is unfairly detrimental to people's work life balance.

Solution: Help everyone to maintain a good work-life balance by saving emails in your drafts and sending them the next working day. Often you won't even send them come the morning, when you talk to each other instead. You can use phone calls or texts when a genuine need arises out of hours.

Sending emails when a question pops into your head

It might be convenient for you, but it can be a real productivity killer for recipients if they get lots of emails with questions in them.

Solution: Make a list of what you need to talk to someone about. Then arrange for a quick chat with that person to go through all the questions you need to ask them.

REMEMBER!

The number one rule for sending information *one-way*. As soon as you start using email to request information beyond the simplest of responses, its limitations soon become apparent.

Writing emails that take a long time to respond to

It's very easy to write a small email that needs a big answer. This just leads to delays. Often the recipient will be on a mobile device and not inclined to reply.

Solution: If you do need to ask a question, then yes/no questions or "I propose to do" rather than "What should I do?" will give you the best chance of a quick response.

Using Outlook when you should be using your CRM system

Sending emails directly to client contacts does not leave an audit trail for your colleagues.

Solution: This is one of the hardest good habits to get into, but the benefits of maintaining a customer audit trail against the customer are obvious. Information regarding tickets, projects and opportunities should be kept within your CRM system to maintain a full audit trail.

Replying to all

Replying to an email using the 'Reply To All' feature is not always a good feature to use. It creates additional email traffic in everyone's Outlook, and not everyone needs to read your reply.

Solution: If you need to reply to an email, check the recipients list. Does it need to go to everyone that's listed? Does everyone need to know your response or does it just need to go to the original sender?

Having an emotional response to an email

If you receive an email that triggers any form of emotional response, then be aware that this may not have been the intention of the sender.

Solution: It is so easy to write something or read something hastily and for miscommunication to occur as a result. It's well documented how often and easily emails are misinterpreted. Any email that triggers an emotional response of any kind should not be replied to. Speak with the person who sent the email, and you'll probably find you're both on the same wavelength.

Trying to use email to reach a decision

Like tornados, the email chains created when trying to make a decision start small but can quickly grow out of control. Of course, people do this because they want to maintain an audit trail (cover their behind), but what tends to happen instead is that frustration increases while a decision gets no closer.

Solution: Write a draft email with the points and detail you need to cover - but don't send it. Use this draft as an agenda for a meeting or phone call. Once agreement has been made, update the draft to reflect the final decision and send it with "Further to our conversation..." at the top of the email. Documenting decisions this way is one of email's most powerful uses.