



What To Do With It All Treating E-mail As Correspondence

- Paul H. Burton

As a productivity consultant, I routinely hear, "But I just don't know what to do with it all!" This, of course, is in response to the vast volume of e-mail, texts and tweets people receive. As an example of how bad it's getting, I recently met with a social networking maven who confessed to having 10 .pst files just to keep her Outlook from crashing!

Clearly, e-mail and its progeny have gotten out of control and this problem will only get worse as social media continues to develop. What are we mere mortals to do? Wishing it away won't work. Ignoring it won't work. Hoping for a technology-based solution only seems to exacerbate the problem. So, it's back to the drawing board, as well as trip to the past, to craft an effective solution.

E-mail, et al, is correspondence; treat it as such

All these methods of electronic communication are ways to correspond. Simple enough really. However, getting people

to treat them as such is more about changing perspectives and behaviors than it is about better understanding how these electronic methods work. Here are a few points to consider by way of explanation:

Inbox used as a depository rather than a transitory collection point

I routinely work with individuals who have Inboxes containing 15,000-25,000 e-mails! Back in the technological Dark Ages (i.e., pre-e-mail), it was literally impossible to even have 100 things in your physical inbox. How did this come to be?

People are afraid to delete things "in case they need them." This is a downward spiral once it starts because it gets easier and easier to just leave everything in the Inbox instead of making decisions about the disposition of these items. Consequently, the Inbox becomes the hall closet into which all things go.

The problem is that the Inbox was never designed for this use and there are only marginally effective methods for making it work this way (sorting, searching, etc.).

Improper Inbox setup

Out-of-the-box e-mail setups generally promote this depository behavior. A terrific example of this is the Reading Pane. Many people use Reading Pane to review e-mail. However, only viewing e-mails without actually opening them begins the process of letting it compost at the bottom of the Inbox! Moreover, most programs are set to return you to the Inbox after dispensing with a particular e-mail, so what's the point of opening it in the first place? This function, as well as the others listed below, contributes to depository behaviors by allowing people to passively collect e-mail in the Inbox instead of processing it along the way.

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Failure to develop an adequate electronic filing system

Most people haven't developed an effective filing architecture for easy location and retrieval of their e-mail. This further promotes the Inbox as a place to store things. Even those intrepid few who develop a folder system in the Inbox suffer from the related problem of overloading their application's ability to effectively and efficiently manage the application itself which ultimately causes the program (like Outlook) to slow down or corrupt and crash.

Reboot: E-mail as correspondence

Sit back for a moment and consider e-mail and all the other forms of communication that have developed over the last 25 years - voice mail, texting, tweeting, etc. They are all forms of correspondence; ways to pass information back and forth. Acknowledging this fact provides the answer about what to do next. Process it! Get it out of the Inbox!

As a side note, identifying these items as correspondence will eliminate overload because you begin to ask yourself whether any particular e-mail, text or tweet is truly valuable – both on the send and on the receive side. As you re-orient your perspective about these forms of communication, the quantity you send (and, hopefully, receive) will go down and the quality will go up.

But let's get back to the point – processing e-mail as correspondence. To effectively process e-mail, you will need three things:

- Proper setup of your Inbox for batch processing.
- A way to categorize each e-mail.
- An action to associate with each categorized e-mail.

Setting up your Inbox to batch process e-mail

There are three key changes to your Inbox settings that will allow you to batch process your e-mail. (Note, this segment assumes you are using Microsoft Outlook 2003 or 2007. However, other e-mail programs contain similar settings.)

1. **Turn off the Reading Pane.** View, Reading Pane, Off.
2. **Turn off Show-In-Groups.** View, Arrange by, uncheck Show In Groups.
3. **Set to Open Next Item.** Tools, Options, E-mail Options, select Open Next Item in top drop down for “After moving or deleting an open item.”

Now, your e-mail will appear in the Inbox as a list of things to process. Open the top one and begin processing based on the categories in the next paragraph.

Categories of correspondence

Treating e-mail as correspondence means it can be processed in the same fashion as other types of correspondence. I have only discovered five categories for all the correspondence that we receive – physically and electronically:

1. **Trash.** Items that need to be thrown away/deleted.
2. **Archive.** Items that need to be stored for possible future retrieval.
3. **Reference.** Items we routinely refer to while accomplishing our work.
4. **Reading.** Professional reading materials to stay abreast in our field.
5. **Work.** Things that need to get done.

Note that the first three categories are all “closed” – nothing further needs to be done with them. The latter two categories are “open” – something needs to be done with them before they become closed.

That's it. Really. The only things you need to be willing to do are pause briefly on each item and decide what it is. Once

you categorized it, you know what to do with it. If not, keep reading!

Actions associated with categories

The final step in processing your e-mail (and other electronic and physical correspondence) is doing something with it so it leaves your Inbox. Each category has an associated action, as follows:

1. **Trash.** Throw it away or delete it.
2. **Archive.** File it away in a long-term storage area.
3. **Reference.** Put it away in an easily-accessed storage area.
4. **Reading.** Pile it away so you can grab one or two at time to read.
5. **Work.** Develop or adopt a method of managing the work contained in your e-mail.

Processing your e-mail is fairly straight forward once you treat it as correspondence. Categorizing each item and applying the associated action effectively processes 80% of your e-mail (the first four categories), leaving you only the open Work correspondence with which to contend. Those items can be processed as you have always processed correspondence containing Work or you can adopt a more technologically-integrated method.

The cliff hanger here is which method do you choose? QuietSpacing™ is one method, though there are others out there. I'll leave that decision to you.

Also, as an additional note on processing Archive and Reference items, you can either build out a folder/sub-folder system in Outlook or save e-mails (and corresponding attachments) as a file on your local or network storage drive for other documents. (File, Save as, select Save as type: Outlook message format (*.msg).)

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Once Processing, Always Processing

E-mail is simply a form of correspondence. Treat it as such. Until you realign your thinking to view it this way, it will be difficult to effectively and efficiently manage it. However, once you adopt that perspective, the processing of e-mail and its brethren becomes much easier.

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individualized coaching. You can learn more about Paul and his practice at www.quietspacing.com.

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Busting Procrastination-By-Computer

- Dan Crystal, Psy.D.

A computer seems to have two competing purposes: a mind organizer and a mind eraser. The tool we use to refine our thoughts in precision-crafted legalese is married to the ultimate implement of distraction: the Internet. There are few things as mindless in life as surfing the Internet. It's a semi-passive act. While we do the clicking, the choices of action are fairly narrow with highlighted keywords, pictures, or video serving as our options. It's a dissociative experience where most people report "losing track of time" along the way. I've worked in treatment with lawyers who have frittered away hours following the stock market, reading up on gossip, watching TV on hulu.com, or chatting on Facebook as opposed to doing their work. No one's talking about how much fun it is.

There are no perfect solutions to this inconvenient pairing. Getting your work

done requires being able to write briefs on Microsoft Word or to use Outlook to check your schedule and email. At the same time, the Internet has become the means by which we learn about things, buy plane tickets, pay our bills, make plans with friends, get directions, and so on.

Here are a few tips for exerting control over your Internet forays:

- Use an egg timer! This way you are held accountable for the time spent on online distractions.
- Make a list of the things you need to research online and only go to those sites.
- Wait until you get home before you forage in the world of Internet mindlessness.

- Print out web pages you want to read rather than spending more time than necessary behind a computer.

It's natural for all of us to need breaks from hard work. The trick with procrastination is to feel rejuvenated by the time we spend away from our work as opposed to feeling avoidant of our responsibilities. Try to recognize if taking a walk around the block, meeting a friend for lunch, or taking a few minutes out to meditate in a local park will serve you better than the latest updates on the Huffington Post or playing solitaire. Remember: You Do Have a Choice!



Lawyer Services: Our Contributions towards Techno Dinosaur

- Rebecca Nerison



Is it my imagination, or is it getting more difficult for those of us of a *certain age* to keep up with new systems, tools, and technologies that appear with unrelenting persistence? A late adopter for everything from cell phones to DVDs, I have yet to own an MP3 player or send my first text message. Part of me is perfectly content with my techno-limits: toting my paper calendar, reading emails, and listening to voicemails. I get by just fine, thank you very much.

Yet every day I observe someone using technology to accomplish a goal faster and easier: an email distribution list obviating the need to re-enter individual addresses; synchronized calendars enabling people to set up meetings without repeated back-and forth messages; a GPS device that gets you to the deposition without getting lost; sending a text message to your assistant while you're stuck in court saying you'll be late for your next appointment. While these devices and tools don't necessarily simplify our lives, they enable us to do certain things that would have been impossible just a few years ago. That's the carrot.

There's a stick involved, as well. To illustrate, observe my 89 year old mother's struggle to make a CD player do her bidding. I am afraid that if I don't make reasonably consistent efforts to keep up with what's going on out there, I will become a Techno Dinosaur myself and be unable to do things when I'm 89. Do I really want to become increasingly alienated from my culture as the language and tools used to conduct both business and personal life morph into the unfathomable? I don't think so.

Thus, I've embarked on my own personal Dinosaur Prevention Plan. Since I'm certain I'm not the only techno-challenged person out there facing this dilemma (you know who you are), I think it's worth reviewing how we at the WSBA Lawyer Services Department can support you in your professional and personal endeavors as they relate to keeping up with technology.

LOMAP – Law Office Management Assistance Program

Pete Roberts and Julie Salmon are your first stop on the road to techno-literacy. Pete keeps up with law office technology by attending the ABA's annual tech show each year. He's happy to chat about your office needs and make some recommendations to get you started. Likewise, a visit to LOMAP will enable you to try out software for tasks such as case management, accounting, time and billing, and contact management before committing to a purchase. Julie is pleased to guide you through this process. In addition, you can check out books from LOMAP's lending library that will advise you on topics such as Internet marketing, using handheld devices, Microsoft programs, Adobe Acrobat, and using your computer to do fact finding and generate professional presentations. Finally, LOMAP conducts computer clinics twice a month to help you become more proficient with the software you already have on your computer.

Visit the LOMAP website at: <http://www.lomap.org>.

ETHICS – Professional Responsibility Program

Have you ever wondered about the ethical implications of ever-changing technology? Our Professional Responsibility Counsel, David Powell, does. Unfortunately, the Rules of Professional Conduct don't keep up with technology, either, so there's not a lot of guidance on specific issues. The most recent information he dug up for us can be viewed via the links below. Stay tuned because future RPCs and opinions will no doubt address the inevitable ethical dilemmas that are rising as we speak.

The ABA recently instituted a new commission on technology:

http://www.abanet.org/abanet/media/release/news_release.cfm?releaseid=730

Read a brief summary of an ABA technology survey:

http://www.abanet.org/abastore/books/inside_practice/2008/may/articles/Technology-and-Ethical-Obligations.html

See WSBA Informal Ethics opinions 1940 for general ethics concerns regarding web sites:

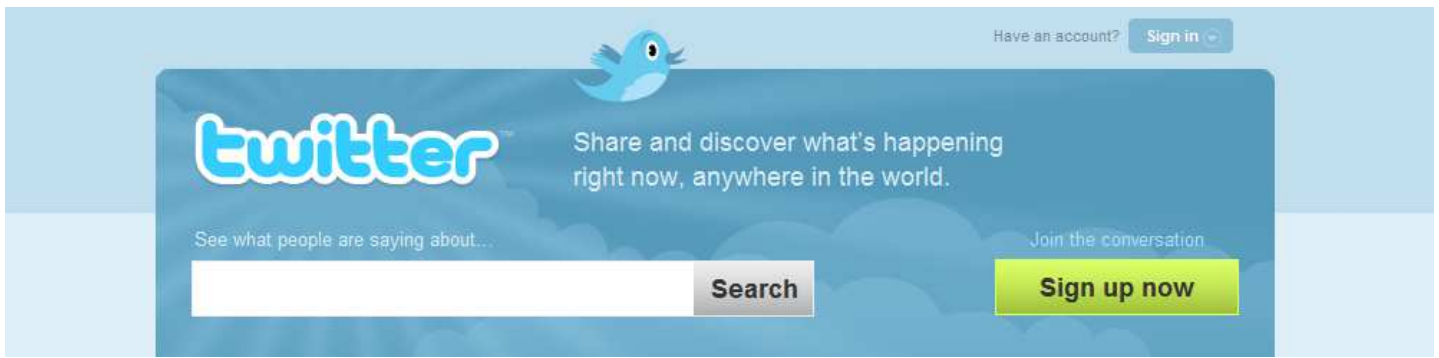
<http://pro.wsba.org/IO/print.aspx?ID=1180>

Read WSBA Informal Ethics Opinion 2108 for guidance concerning web-based payment systems:

<http://pro.wsba.org/IO/print.aspx?ID=1545>



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To Twitter or Not to Twitter?

- Julie Salmon

I must admit that I really enjoy technology because it makes the seemingly impossible possible. The internet is a wonderful tool; we have access to more information now – perhaps too much – than was ever imaginable. That being said, am I the only one who gets a little nauseated every time some new technology tool/service/device is unveiled and deemed a must have? For example, I have resisted all efforts to get a Facebook or MySpace account, even though I should be monitoring my children's pages. LinkedIn seemed like a better fit because it provides a professional business networking group and it can be as low or high maintenance as you wish. When Twitter arrived on the scene in 2006 it did not appeal to me whatsoever. Why would I want to know what other people are doing or thinking every day? It didn't fulfill any need I had or really make any sense for me to become familiar with a new tool that would require me to remember, oh my goodness, yet another user name and password.

Well, the need and reason soon arose in the form of being able to receive real-time updates of college soccer games for my sons attending east coast schools. I received an email from the coaches this summer letting parents know that we can now follow the team on Twitter. Wow, Twitter would enable me to know game results sooner rather than later, and that did appeal to me. Thus began the process of complicating my life with yet another communication tool.

First of all, I needed clarification on what Twitter is and does. According to the Wikipedia "Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets." Tweets? Really – it sounds a little juvenile, but I kept an open mind. I found a better description in The 12-Minute Definitive Guide to Twitter by Fred Stutzman as follows: "Twitter is essentially a net-based chat-room filled with your friends." Harmless enough, right?

Should you choose to partake of this strange new world, go to <http://twitter.com/> to set up your account. From there, click the **Sign up now** link and you will be taken to a screen that asks you to enter your name, choose a user name, create a password, and enter your email address. Then click on **Create my account**. After that you are basically done with the set-up, but it is a little confusing as to what to do next - how to actually use Twitter. But first, a co-worker informed me that you want to "protect" your "tweets" so only those you choose can see what you are "tweeting" about. Do this immediately or you may have "favorites" linked to your account that will need to be blocked. To "protect" your account you need to go to **Settings** on your account page which is located in the upper right hand side of your page. At the bottom of the settings page you will see this option and will need to check that box:

Protect my tweets

Your tweets are then protected; only people you approve will receive your tweets. You will not appear on the public timeline. Tweets posted previously may still be publicly visible in some places.

From this settings page you can also enable your cell phone to receive tweets, which was my goal - to receive updates about soccer games. There is a second step in receiving the "tweets" on your phone: click on the page of those you are "following" which will yield the list of people. Each of those listed will show a settings button that will need to be clicked to allow updates to be sent to your mobile phone. This last step wasn't obvious to me and I was under the impression that the system was not working until I investigated further and found how the "tweets" are sent to your phone. This is a nice feature if you only want select "followings" to be sent to your cell phone, especially if you have a limited amount of text messages you can receive without incurring additional cell phone charges. If you do intend to have the "tweets" sent to your phone you might want to upgrade your cell phone service to unlimited text messaging to save money because charges will accrue for these "tweets".

Now I am a Twitter user and waiting patiently for those "tweets" to be sent to me. I only have two listed "followings" – my sons – so I may be

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LAWYERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM – LAP

At the August 2009 meeting of our Job Seeker Discussion Group, two young lawyers taught participants how to use blogs (short for “web logs”) to find a job or clients. You can listen to their lecture at <http://www.wsba.org/lawyers/services/FullerSmall.mp3>, and their PowerPoint presentation can be found at <http://www.wsba.org/lawyers/services/bloggingforjobseekersandsolos.ppt> I was impressed by how these two lawyers quickly built thriving practices on a shoestring using this technology. And I was amazed to discover that blogs can look just like web sites! I love learning about tools like this to pass along to my clients who are struggling to build practices or to find a job.

In addition to serendipitous techno-discoveries, LAP can help you cope with feelings attending the unemployment as well as the “over-employment” – feeling overwhelmed, over-worked, under-appreciated, and generally stressed. We provide a place to take a time out and get some perspective on your life and work. And if you’d like to embark on a Dinosaur Prevention Plan of your own, we’re happy to support you.

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waiting for awhile. I am still not entirely sure of the value of this service for me. I think it would be useful if I could get service notices or reminders of upcoming events through programs I belong or subscribe to. Colleges and law schools utilize Twitter in that regard and I can see how that would work in that setting. I heard the other day of a program being sold to doctor’s offices whereby text messages are being sent to patients’ phones as reminders of doctors appointments, instead of phone calls. This appeals to me because I would rather receive a text message than a phone call.

The jury is still out on the value of this tool in general. It has potential, for example, to become a lifeline in an emergency situation as agencies such as the American Red Cross exchange minute-to-minute information about local disasters, including statistics and directions. Or, I could become one of the 60 percent of Twitter users who drop the service after a month as reported by Nielsen Online. We shall see.

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