

Client Bulletin

January 2006

Email expands to fill your day — if you're not careful

"Work expands to fill the time available for its completion." How many times have you thought you were tracking ahead of schedule on a project only to find that you barely completed it before the deadline? You had plenty of time. What happened?

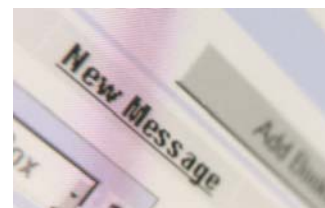
This previously mentioned formula, known as Parkinson's Law was invented by English political analyst Cyril Northcote Parkinson. The more time you have to do something the more the tendency is to use all the available time on that task. The law has been applied to and been found to be valid in many realms, not just work per se. Others areas of applicability are "the data we have will fill the available disk space", and as simple as our "cupboards will fill to capacity". The list is endless.

A big culprit for many people at the office and at home is e-mail. [Many spend more time than needed going through e-mails.] E-mail has become so prevalent in the

work and home life. In the US, 88% of adult internet users have personal e-mail accounts. 46% of them have e-mail access at work. The two together reach a total of 147 million people across the country who use e-mail almost every day according to eMarketer.

E-mail like any other activity, must be organized so that too much time is not spent managing the process. There must be an important shift in focus as in any time management scenario. One must *"Concentrate on results, not on being busy". Many people spend their days in a frenzy of activity, but achieve very little because they are not concentrating on the right things.*" – MindTools. The loss of time to e-mail can be corrected by applying four simple practices.

First the role of e-mail must be defined. What role does e-mail play in your work. If it is your method of communication and passing of work-relevant information then



Do you find yourself in email quick sand?

e-mail should rank near the top.

For most of us the answer to this is "YES", but not all messages are important. America Online estimates that spam already accounts for more than 30 percent of e-mail that makes it to its members – as many as 24 million messages a day - The Standard.

Many e-mail messages can be deleted without being read. E-mails of this type can be set up to automatically go directly to "Junk e-mail". In addition, don't waste time reviewing e-mails that are useless because of the "hook" in the subject line.

After determining the priority level of e-mail as it applies to your work you must set aside uninterrupted time to review e-

Special bulletin

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mail. We all experience a great number of interruptions throughout our day. It is difficult to produce quality work when constant interruptions are allowed.

If you would like to find out more about how to efficiently process your e-mails please contact The Franke Group at 615.300.7476.

Just as we can not let e-mail interrupt our work nor should we be interrupted as we try to process our e-mail. It is important that we find time each day for checking our e-mail. Find a time when you are least likely to be interrupted and discipline yourself to keep this "appointment" to process e-mails. Of course you can scan your e-mail through out the day for critical e-mails.

Another simple principle is "DON'T use your e-mail name at sites that are not important for you to receive information. Many sites purposely request your "e-mail" address for Login ID for the sole purpose of passing it along. This increases your chances of spam. Have a separate e-mail account that these useless messages can go to without junking up your useful, true *working* e-mail account.

Finally, turn off the e-mail notification. You will be less tempted to immediately check your e-mail. *Time Magazine* reported January 16, 2006, on a study done by Gloria Mark and Victor Gonzalez of the University of California at Irvine. The researchers tracked 36 office workers at an investment firm--and recorded how they spent their time, minute by minute.

The researchers found that the employees devoted an average of just 11 minutes to a project before the ping of an e-mail, the ring of the phone or a knock on the cubicle pulled them in another direction. The astounding statistics is that once they were interrupted, it took, on average, 25 minutes to return to the original task--if they managed to do so at all that day.

That is a big price to pay to merely see if an interesting message has been left in your Inbox. Even if you do not actually stop to check the message focus and concentration are lost by the mere sound of the ping.