



# MASTERMIND INNER CIRCLE LETTER

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## How to Maximize Your Productivity With Emails

### Editor's Note

Today, we have Chee Wong from Expert Messaging. Chee specializes in productivity maximization when working with Internet-based technology and email. He will be covering email productivity issues and providing some tips on how you can better manage your emails.

### Tell us a little bit about what you do and Expert Messaging?

Expert Messaging provides training programs in Australia and in Europe. The original program, which is a 60-minute program, was written many years ago and helps people to be more productive when they sit down in front of their emails. Essentially, we at Expert Messaging help transform the way that people think about emails and provide a little bit of skills and knowledge transfer.

At Expert Messaging, we've found that the primary and biggest problems these days is the way that people think about emails and their mindset about the way they should handle them. Once they change their mindset, it appears that skills and the knowledge that most people have already mastered throughout the years enables them to be more productive with their emails.

### How did you get started in this field?

The program was actually written by Bob Hallewell in the UK, who is an expert in how people and organisations communicate by email. He has been in the business communications, technology & training fields for well over 25 years. About 13 or 14 years ago, Bob began to realize and witness in his own consultancy and day-to-day work that people are spending just too much of their time on emails.

Most surveys indicate that people are spending anywhere in the vicinity of one and a half to two and a half hours on average, per employee per day on emails. That's a whole lot of time on emails, especially when you think about some of the higher paid executives in your firm - do you really want them to be spending two hours a day on emails, some of which may have a very low ROI or is a low value way to spend a couple of hours of their time?

Sometimes some of that time spent results in a very high value ROI. However, from the statistics that we have gathered, it appears that most emails can either be eliminated, avoided, or can be handled in some other way rather than be routed to the person that's been delegated to handle it.

As a result of that, Bob wrote a program that started as a three-hour program to try and transform the way that people deal with emails in the UK. Shortly after that, the program became two hours long, and it's now a 60 minute program at the current stage.

In 2012, I started doing that in Australia and that's where we are today - helping corporate Australia and corporate citizens in the UK and Europe to better handle their emails. Today, we're saving people about 47 minutes on average, per person per day in terms of saving time.

### **What are the top 5 tips to managing email overload?**

The **first tip** is to turn off alerts. The biggest problem these days are the alerts. By default, Microsoft Outlook, Google, Gmail and most other software that you would install on your desktop, tablets, cell phones and/or smart phones, all have the alerts switched on. Combined with all the alerts on Facebook and on other communication platforms, alerts and notifications are the biggest time waster in the modern workplace today.

Hence, my number one tip is to switch off all the alerts on your tablets, smart phones, and desktops. There is no good reason for using them, except perhaps to ease your tension or anxiety about missing that all important email from your boss or from your *extremely* important client.

The way to alleviate that anxiety is to work out a strategy for yourself by talking to your boss. Ask them, "What sort of time frame do you expect me to answer your emails?" By default, you're going to assume that he or she wants a response as soon as possible or immediately if you don't have that conversation with your boss. That's what most people tend to default to.

However, it is very possible that your boss may have a different expectation of the turnaround time that you want to achieve. Similarly, this is a conversation that those who handle very good clients can have as well.

As it's a fact that it's very unproductive to check your emails, 30, 40, or 50 times a day, your boss or client would understand that this is a rational and logical thing for you to propose since they would want you to be as productive as possible when working on tasks relevant to what they want you to achieve for them.

Thus, in order to handle your anxiety regarding switching off alerts, this is a conversation one should have with their bosses and key clients as well if appropriate and possible.

Speaking of bosses, work culture, and colleagues, my **second tip** is to never use email for urgent communications. Although, some organizations may use emails for urgent communications, emails definitely were never designed for urgent communications and it never should be used in that way.

The simple fact is that emails don't provide us with any real *live immediate feedback*. When we write an email and send it to someone, we can't tell whether that someone has received it

or has understood it or not.

Whereas if you make a phone call to someone, or communicate via teleconference, or by some other means that can give you a live feedback, you're able to tell exactly what the recipient has understood, whether they're concerned, or whether they are happy, etc.

With emails, we can only assume that the other party has received it and understands how important or urgent whatever we're trying to convey is. Thus, the second tip is to never use emails for urgent communication.

The **third tip** is always to proofread your emails before sending. In recent times, some of the software that we have gotten accustomed to is becoming rather smart. For example, the later versions of Outlook 2010 and 2013 has this function that will prompt you when you click the send button if you have mentioned the word “attached”, “attachment”, or “attached” in the email body and haven't attached a file to the email. The software makes the association that you most likely intended on attaching something to the email, and if you haven't done so it will prompt you to reconsider sending the email.

Although some of the software today is becoming pretty smart at prompting us when we have likely made a mistake, nothing is better than proofreading properly. A lot of times, we're still writing emails really quickly or in a rush and some of these emails that we send can never be taken back.

Some of the blunders that have occurred from rushed emails include people getting fired from their job. Sometimes rushed emails that haven't been proofread has resulted in politicians, CEOs, and very highly affiliated executives having to either be fired, or having to make very embarrassing retractions and apologies in the media.

Hence, this is something you would want to be careful with and especially if you are accustomed to sending very important and/or public emails that could potentially have a great reach. Always ensure to proofread emails carefully before hitting the send button.

The **fourth tip** is always to only “Cc” or copy people on emails when necessary. Those in management roles would be familiar with the high number of emails that they receive from their direct subordinates. It seems that the higher up in the hierarchy of an organization that one is, the more “Cc'd” emails he or she receives.

Arguably, CEOs, CIOs, CFOs, etc. would get an exorbitant amount of “Cc” emails, and if asked, they would agree and say that most of those emails are not necessary. In most cases, those emails could be routed to some other person or handled in some other way.

On average, it takes one approximately five minutes to read an email and perhaps make a response sometimes. With that in mind, imagine if there are several people copied in on an email – if 50 people were “Cc'd” an email, it would mean that 250 or more minutes might be spent on that one particular email's content/context.

Larger organizations obviously face this problem to a greater extent – the larger an organization is, the more likely the problem with unnecessary “Cc’d” emails could escalate and it is evident that “Cc’ing” is one of the biggest problems for very large organizations.

Thus, before you send an email and “Cc” several people, think about whether they really need to be “Cc’d” in on that list or not, and then copy only the people who absolutely need to be copied.

My **fifth tip** is to always check emails according to your own goals rather than be dictated by alerts or anything else.

Ask yourself, “What’s your personal standard in terms of answering emails? How quickly do your clients and your boss and your colleagues expect you to reply to their emails?”. Is it 24 hours, 48 hours, 4 hours, 20 minutes, or half an hour? If unsure, ask your colleagues, managers, boss, or your clients. Find out what their expectations are, and you will find that their answer isn’t “instantly” because that it is unrealistic and wouldn’t allow for productivity maximization during work hours.

Once you have figured out what your KPIs or response times are, work out your strategies to achieve your KPI. For example, if your KPI is 24-hours, you most likely only have to check your emails once or twice a day to achieve it.

Instead of constantly checking your emails and being buried by the alerts and notifications from your inbox, tablets, or smart phones, set a strategy and a goal to manage your emails appropriately. Block out time throughout the work day for answering emails and put it in your calendar.

Then, check and answer your emails during the intervals you have scheduled. You will soon realize that you're spending a lot less time on emails, and most likely will be able to reduce the amount of time spent on those emails at each interval.

Those are the top five tips for handling emails.

### **What are some of the biggest mistakes that you see people make when it comes to handling email?**

As previously mentioned, alerts and the mindset about emails are the biggest mistakes when it comes to handling email. Often in our instant and very fast work-pace society, we always want to do things quickly and instantly. We want answers immediately. This has flowed through to emails, instant messaging, SMS and other forms of communication as well.

A lot of people don't realize that it is not practical to do things instantly in terms of replying to SMSes and emails. It's definitely a hindrance on productivity. Thus, if one is going to be able to be at their best and be at their productive best, they have to be able to switch off those alerts and then handle the situation appropriately.

Just to point out, it takes only 30 seconds of your time to switch off the alerts. If you don't know how to, you can ask your IT help desk to assist you to switch off the alerts on your desktop computers, smart phones, and tablets.

If there's no IT support you can access, a simple search on either Google or YouTube will lead you to an article or video on how to switch off the alerts in Outlook. Simply put, turning off the alerts is definitely not a skill or knowledge problem and can easily be done.

Secondly, the mindset – all the anxiety about missing an important email or missing a VIP client's email contributes more to the problem of handling emails unproductively.

In order to combat this problem and to be more productive, one needs to find a way to become comfortable with the idea of having alerts switched off. Once the alerts are switched off, the anxiety disappears and only then can people maximize the time they spend on emails.

Thus, the most common and biggest problem in handling emails is the alerts and the anxiety that people need to manage in their day-to-day.

### **What are some of the benefits that people receive when following these tips?**

There are **three major benefits** that people will receive from utilizing these tips. The first benefit is saving time. If you ever want to justify taking some of these steps to rectify your own personal productivity but you need to convince your boss, say, "Look boss, I want to only check my emails four times a day and that means it is going to result in a compromise in the response times."

In addition, mention that the people who have undergone Expert Messaging's 60-minute program have managed to save 47 minutes per person per day, which is *a lot* of time when you think of how much time they are saving per week, per month, and per year.

Providing that your boss is a rational and logical person, they would be able to appreciate that in those 47 minutes you're going to be able to do more work in other areas instead of checking emails.

It's a very compelling argument to have and it's definitely a conversation one should have with their bosses, managers or clients. Thus, the first benefit received from following the tips provided is saving time.

The second benefit is a reduced level of stress. Approximately 60% of people that go through our 60-minute program report a reduction in stress. They simply feel a lot more comfortable and more at ease in terms of their relationship with email.

These days, a lot of people dread taking annual leave because they know that their email inbox is going to accumulate in the couple of weeks that they're going to be away from their emails and their office. These people tend to log in remotely and clear the emails during their holidays, and that's not the ideal way to enjoy their time off.

In fact, these people dread the day that will return to their office – to their desktops – because they just know that they're going to be faced with 500 to 1000 emails. Some people even don't want to switch on the email after lunch because they know that there is going to be several emails that they're going to have to contend with.

Evidently, stress is a big problem in terms of emails. Therefore, once people become comfortable with switching off alerts and have conversations with their boss and clients about response times, the stress will reduce dramatically.

The third and last benefit that will be provided here is a reduced number of “Cc'd” emails. We previously alluded to “Cc'ing” and the number of emails that people receive daily. If you put some of these practices into place you're going to receive fewer emails.

Firstly, you'll be sending out fewer emails yourself. Secondly, because you're sending out fewer emails, less people are going to be able to reply to your emails.

Hence, you're going to be receiving less emails overall and that will be extremely beneficial to you and to those around you.

Those are the top three benefits that people have received from following some of our tips: you're going to be saving 47 minutes on average (more or less for some) per day, you're going to be receiving fewer emails, and you're going to be less stressed about your relationship with email.

The significant amount of time that people can save is a great thing for themselves, their business and company, and their boss. That's the bottom line.

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Do you want to know more about how you can be more efficient and make your time spent on dealing with emails more productive?

Contact us for the course details:  
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Are there any other business or financial topics that you would like to be featured in a future issue of this newsletter?

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