

Email Overload:

Practical Tools for Influencing Email Volume in the Age of Telecommuting

Loralyn Cross, LSSBB

Cell 619-218-1758

lkcross@ucsd.edu

A little bit about me...

- Alumna of UC San Diego (Human Development)
- Nearly 20 years of varied administrative, business and operational experience
- Received both my Green and Black Belt for LSS through UC San Diego Extension
- My 2019 Black Belt project was focused on improving administrative processes for the Office of Research Affairs
- Part of that project was focused on email management, and I will be sharing those lessons learned with you today!



Poll: How many emails do you receive in a day?

Click Here



Search

View

Help

Acrobat

Current Mailbox ^

Search In Current Mailbox

Attachments

Attachment Contains

From

Body

Received

Subject Today

To Yesterday

This Week

+ Add more options Last Week

This Month

1

2

3

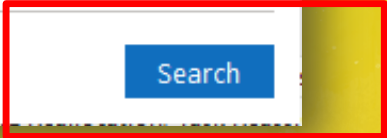
Received Yesterday

Subject

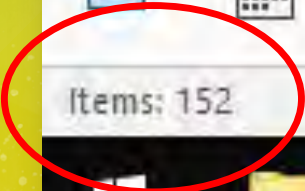
To

+ Add more options

Search



Items: 152

A Windows taskbar showing icons for File Explorer, Google Chrome, OneDrive, and Microsoft Office applications (Word, Excel).



Poll: How many emails do you receive in a day?



≥ 300 Emails received/day

200+ VC Research / 100+ Exec Ast



≥ 75 Emails sent/day

25+ VC Research / 50+ Exec Ast



~ 40 Emails/hr

Processing 2 Emails per minute in a 10 hour day

Waste in Email

Do any of these look familiar???



Examples of Waste



Content across multiple emails

Sending something twice (“better twice than not at all!”)

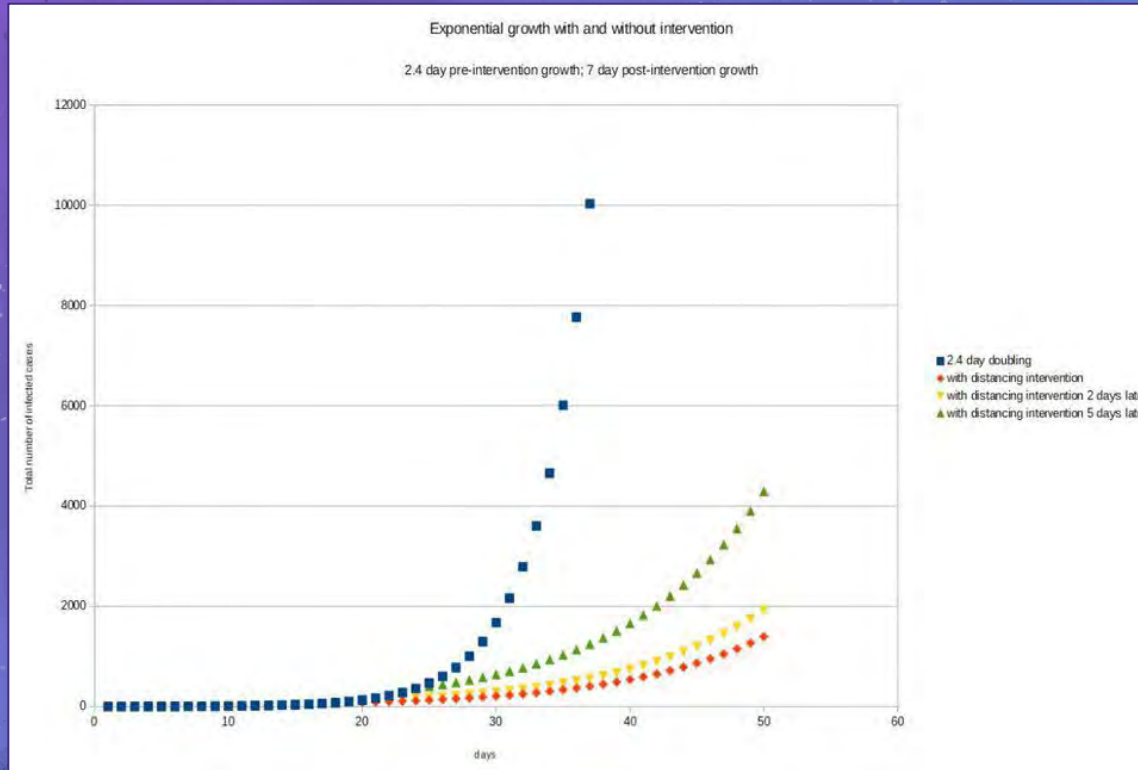
Requests for emails to be sent again because the original one can’t be found (“I don’t remember getting that, can you send it again?”)

Crossed emails

Multiple versions out for editing at once, requiring merging

Missed deadlines

Self-perpetuating Cycle of Endless Emails



Self-perpetuating Cycle of Endless Emails

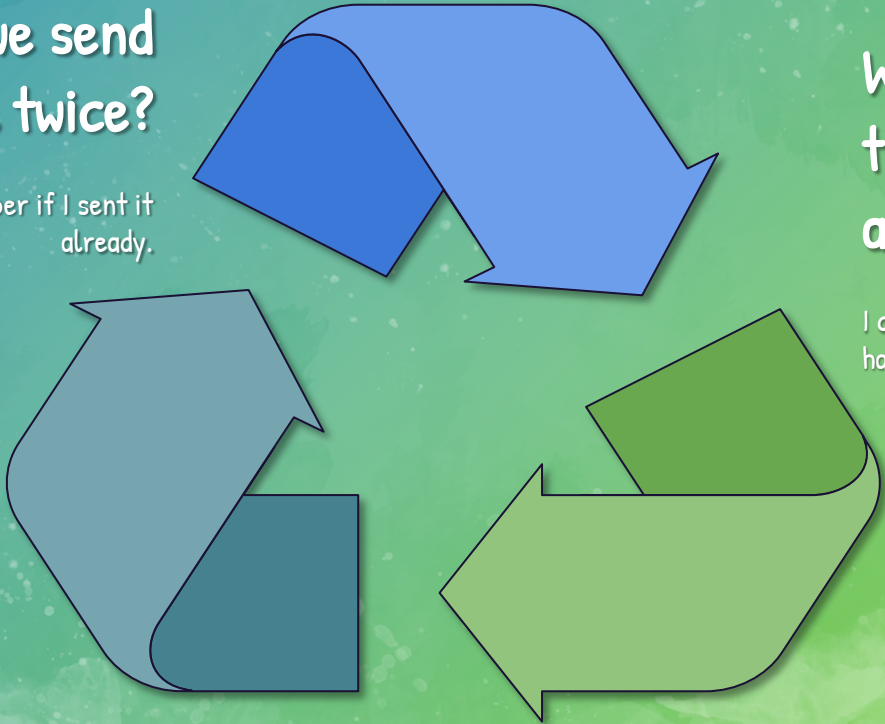
Why did we send that email twice?

I couldn't remember if I sent it already.

Why didn't we check to see if we had already sent it?

I don't have time to stop and check - I have too many emails to get through!

Isn't that just adding to the cycle?



“

Improved
productivity means
less human sweat,
not *more* .

~Henry Ford



STOP THE CYCLE

Key Tips



Response Time

Don't prioritize a quick response time over everything else. If errors are made at the expense of a timely response, it is more harmful than helpful.



Specialized Tasks

It's often more efficient to have people specialize in specific tasks.



Slow Down

It is critical to slow down just when things feel the most urgent. Taking the time to get it right the first time avoids defects and re-work.



Use The Right Tool

Use the correct communication platform for what is needed (email, teams/slack, text, meetings). Don't overuse email out of comfort!



Prioritize Quality

Prioritize quality over quantity. One good email with a summary of all important information is far more useful than multiple emails with bits and pieces of what is needed.



Drastic Times/Measures

Cut out all the pleseentries that are typically deleted anyway; they just bog down your inbox.

Response Time

A quick response time is typically associated with good “customer service”...

but if errors are made at the expense of responding in a timely manner, it's more harmful than helpful.

Errors are often accepted as the “cost” of a fast paced office...

but we can and *should* strive for a higher standard!

There is a need to be responsive to requests and it is valid to acknowledge a request, provide a projected response time or give a necessary update...

but that doesn't mean we should rush the request/task itself.

Slow Down to Speed Up

Cut volume of excessive,
unnecessary emails

Less time spent on
email management

More time spent
on actual tasks

Increase
productivity

Prioritize Quality, Not Quantity



Quality Over Quantity Continued...

Consider the path of a task through email

Ashley: Hey, Brad, can you do this?

Brad: That's not me, I'll pass it on to Charlie

Brad: Hey, Charlie, this is for you right?

Charlie: Yeah, can you let Ashley know?

Brad: Sure, will do

Brad: Ashley, it's actually Charlie who can help you with that

Ashley: Hey, Charlie, sounds like you are the person who can help me

Charlie: [Completes task]

TOTAL EMAILS: 8

Ashley: Hey, Brad, can you do this?

Brad: That's not me, it's actually Charlie, and I'm copying them to this email.

Charlie: Yup, that's me, moving Brad to bc and taking care of the task for you Ashley

TOTAL EMAILS: 3

Specialization of Administrative Tasks



	PROS:	CONS:
Non-Specialization Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quick response time• Cross-training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to email the entire team• No "ownership" of each request – who is ultimately responsible?• Often overlap between work shifts; multiple people handling various parts of the same task, even for non-urgent items• If anyone is removed at any point from the email chain, it becomes unclear who is doing what; balls get dropped or duplicate work is done

EXAMPLE: Standardized letter of support requiring the VC's signature; request was sent to entire team. Due to overlapping work shifts and direct replies (vs reply-all) 7 total emails ended up being sent, and the letter was completed twice by two different people.

	PROS:	CONS:
Specialization Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased number of people required to complete task• Decreased overall number of emails sent• Less confusion about who is going to handle task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to cross-train for each task and have a back-up plan for urgent items

EXAMPLE: For the same standardized letter of support; request is now sent to the one person responsible for this task. Only two total emails are now required; the original request, and the finalized letter.

Use The Right Communication Tool

Tool	When to use it 	When not to use it 
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official communications • Dispersing important documentation • When written record is necessary • Updates that don't require back and forth correspondence • Confirmation of action items, summary of understanding • Delivery of items (files, calendar invites, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time sensitive collaboration or response • Discussion of sensitive information • Topics that require back and forth communication • Topics where the "tone" or intention can be misconstrued • Anytime the email chain is likely to grow to dozens of emails
Zoom Meeting/Call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly reaching clarity on a determined goal • Discussion of sensitive information • Topics where the "tone" or intention can be misconstrued • Routine team check ins & building rapport • Topics that require back and forth collaboration and discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the objective for the meeting/call is unclear • When the objective can be met through more efficient methods
Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent matters • Calling attention to a specific item 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large amounts of information
Collaboration Tools (Teams/Slack)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured back and forth communication • Casual discussion among teams • Digital brainstorming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of sensitive information • Documentation is necessary
File Sharing Tools (Sharepoint, Google, OneDrive, Yammer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editing a single document with multiple collaborators • Timely and collaborative editing is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When discussion of topic is needed • When documentation of discussion progression and communication is required

Drastic Times Call for Drastic Measures

Temporarily cut out ALL pleasantries

Recommended among a close knit or small team; save the nicety emails for those you don't converse with regularly

Confirm with your colleagues that you will be holding off on these types of emails for a period of time; assure them it's temporary while workload is high

Ask your colleagues to do the same!

Email Challenge

Here is my challenge to you; examine and analyze any email chain that has more than 5 replies to it and consider if any of the strategies introduced today might have helped cut down on the number of emails in that chain.

Resources:

Lean Six Sigma

Lean Six Sigma is a methodology used to help continuously improve how we work, the processes we follow, and the services we provide.

BECOP

The UC San Diego Business Excellence Community of Practice is a network of practice for change management, continuous improvement and project management.



Thanks!



Contact me anytime:

Loralyn Cross, LSSBB

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