

NO EMAIL DAY

by

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*This document / manifesto is intended for sharing as widely as possible.
Please read and share with at least one other person and encourage them
to do the same. Feel free to email, link to, or print off paper copies too.*

Introduction

When was the last time you had ZERO emails in your inbox?

I bet it was a long time ago. Take a look at how many emails you've got just sitting there now, like a constant nagging reminder that you have lots of 'stuff' to do which isn't getting done.

At the tail end of 2010 I came to the realisation that every time someone sends you an email they are actually giving you more work to do.

Reading, replying, deleting, forwarding, filing or marking as junk all takes up valuable time, piling even more pressure on your already busy schedule.

There are so many emails flying around every second of the day that it can sometimes feel like dealing with them is all that you're doing. This has certainly happened to me in the past, when a whole morning or even day has been spent just wading through my emails – particularly on the first day back after a holiday. I can cope with it (just about) but I bet there are many people out there who really dread coming back to work after a short break or sickness for fear of what lies waiting in their inbox.

I managed to get my inbox down to zero for the first time in about 10yrs just before Christmas 2010, on Thursday 23rd December to be exact, and it felt AMAZING – like a huge weight off my shoulders and a big sense of achievement (which sounds a little bit sad but true).

I didn't do this the easy way by 'declaring email bankruptcy' (i.e. deleting all my emails) but by systematically and single-mindedly doing the work that each one required and doing my best to ignore all other distractions.

Admittedly, none of these emails were urgent or massively important (hence why they were still sitting in my inbox) but each one symbolised a little promise by me or request for help from the sender which deserved a response. I think it's rude to ignore someone's email.

I managed to get my emails back down to zero for the second time on Wednesday 13th April 2011 (almost 4 months later)! This lasted for approximately 45mins from 3.30pm-4.15pm after which 10 new emails came through in quick succession.

Fast forward to now - I'm still trying to get my emails down to zero and am inviting you to join me in a global [NO EMAIL DAY](#) on 11th November.

NO EMAIL DAY (11.11.11)

[NO EMAIL DAY](#) is a campaign encouraging people to stop using email completely for 24hrs on 11th November 2011 and do something more productive with the time saved instead.

This would involve switching off your email completely (or simply ignoring it) so you can focus completely on your 'real work' or 'art' that is currently going undone. If you do need to contact someone on this day, emails should be strictly off limits – replaced instead by real life, face to face interaction, picking up the phone or perhaps even writing a letter (remember those?) Better still if you can spend time away from work to be inspired and re-connect with the offline world.

We're not anti-email. Far from it. It's a vital and important part of our daily life and one of the greatest inventions known to man. However, it's been overused and abused and hijacked by the spammers and time wasters over the years to the detriment of the human race.

It's also being inadvertently misused by millions of people around the world who think they are sending 'genuinely interesting and important' emails when in fact the recipient considers them to be 'spam'.

If you're finding that email is weighing you down and like the sound of our campaign, you can support us by doing some of all of the following;

1. Firstly, 'Like' our Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/NoEmailDay)
2. Once you've done this, you can share your own thoughts and ideas about our [NO EMAIL DAY](#) campaign, perhaps even what you will be doing instead on 11th November 2011
3. Post links to any great resources, tips and advice on better email management and productivity on the 'Wall' for others to see
4. If you're on Twitter, Follow Us [@NoEmailDayHQ](#) and post a Tweet about our campaign using the special hashtag #noemailday
5. If you're a writer, blogger, journalist or web editor, please link back to www.facebook.com/NoEmailDay and encourage your readers to take a look. The same applies to anyone with any form of influence or responsibility to share information and ideas with others
6. Finally, please share this document with at least one other person and help spread the word about our campaign

Introduce your own NO EMAIL DAY

We've suggested 11th November 2011 as the day for people everywhere to stop using email for 24hrs - for no real reason other than we like the unique and special date format of 11.11.11 and that it's on a Friday.

It's since been pointed out to us that 11th November is also '[Armistice Day](#)' (or 'Remembrance Sunday') - the day which commemorates the end of the First World War in 1918. This is pure coincidence, although some poorly timed and badly written emails can act like explosive bombs when they arrive in your inbox so perhaps some comparisons can be made?

You can of course introduce your own [NO EMAIL DAY](#) at any time before or after this date but here's what we hope you will do.

Individuals

Even if you're the only person you know that is taking part in [NO EMAIL DAY](#), we hope that our campaign will inspire you to get back on track and focus on the real work that you want to do, instead of just responding to other people's requests and demands on your time. If so, we'd love to hear what you achieve via the 'Wall' on our Facebook Page.

Organisations

For those of you who work in an organisation, it would be wonderful if you could share this manifesto with your colleagues and see if you can get them to adopt a team or company-wide [NO EMAIL DAY](#).

Feel free to piggyback on the campaign to generate some positive PR for your business by publicly declaring that your company won't be sending or responding to email on this day as you will be practising more productive and creative work practises instead.

If so, please tell us how this goes and if it does indeed lead to more productivity, innovation and better communications with staff and clients.

What happens after 11th November?

After 11th November the Facebook Page and Twitter Profiles will remain and continue to be a source of free information, advice, tips and guidance for anyone that wants to free themselves from the tyranny of email and be more productive at work and in life. We hope it will encourage and inspire people everywhere to take a small step back into the offline world. But first, some words about why we think this is important...

Why email is good

It's fast.

It's convenient.

It's easy to understand how to use.

It provides a digital record of a conversation between two or more people.

Why email is bad

It's fast – possibly too fast. Because emails are sent and received in an instant it makes people impatient for a quick or possibly immediate response. Admit it, how often have you sent an 'important' email and then been unable to focus on anything else because you're too busy clicking on the 'Send/Receive', 'Check for New Messages' or 'Refresh' button? Not so long ago people got annoyed if they hadn't received a reply in 24hrs but it may be a matter of hours or possibly minutes now.

It's convenient - for who exactly? There are so many times when a telephone conversation or face to face discussion is the only appropriate form of communication to adopt (particularly if it's a difficult situation or problem that needs resolving). There are far too many 'keyboard warriors' out there who sit behind the comfort and protection of their monitor, firing off emails to people containing words that they would never dare say to someone's face. I've also worked with a number of people over the years, particularly young people, who will do ANYTHING to avoid picking up the phone and having a conversation with someone. The time it takes for them to send numerous emails back and forth can be saved by a quick phone call lasting just a few minutes.

It's easy to understand how to use – yes it's easy to learn the basic mechanics of sending and receiving emails, but the vast majority of people only scratch the surface of functionality that programs like Microsoft Outlook and others provide. Few people understand the more important aspect of email usage like when it's appropriate to send an email instead of making that call, how many people should be cc'd in, or how often and how many emails you should send to that person in a single day. In his excellent book ['Bit Literacy'](#), Mark Hurst talks about how most of us lack the skills needed to manage our email inbox effectively and kid ourselves that lots of emails signifies great importance.

It provides a digital record of conversations between two or more people – although I'm sure there are exceptions, the only time I've heard people say this is important is when there's been a breakdown of trust between them and the other party and they're covering their backs for something that is being said in the emails. It suggests suspicion and a lack of trust.

Do you really need email?

Do you or your employees actually need a separate email account to do the work required?

Think about that for a moment. I'm deadly serious.

Yes there are certain jobs where email is an essential tool but does EVERYONE in your organisation really need their own email account?

We've got to a point where we now see private email in the workplace as a basic human right, along with unlimited internet usage, free tea and coffee. However, would it really kill us if we didn't have email at work?

How did people survive and get work done in the past? Could we be even more productive in the workplace without the distractions of email? Admittedly, some would still need their own emails to do their job but many of us could get by with a shared inbox that we all used to send and receive work-related emails. Some will argue that each member of staff needs a personal email address so that HR or Management can send 'important' communications around to everyone at the same time. However, could that same function not be fulfilled by posting important messages on a company Intranet that all staff had set as their browser homepage? Imagine the time and cost savings that could be had by reducing or eliminating the need for individual email inboxes.

If you're a developer or programmer, do you need your own email or would you be much better off without it so you could focus more on writing amazing code and completing the project on time and on budget?

If you're an artist, musician or writer, is email getting in the way of you being creative and producing your work of art?

As a former DJ/producer I can tell you that this has happened to me in the past. When I started to enjoy a little bit of success and began turning my hobby into a career, I spent less and less time being creative and producing music as the mundane side of running a business took over.

The emails and admin got in the way of my 'art' until I eventually lost my mojo and fell out of love with the music. Don't let that happen to you. There's a good reason why the most successful artists, actors, writers and athletes surround themselves with a team of people who can take care of the boring stuff so they can focus completely on their passions.

Could you go without email for a whole 24hrs, limit yourself to certain times of the day or week, or ditch it completely for a week, month or year? Just think what amazing things you could create in whatever time you free up from the tyranny of email.

Tips for better email management

1. If you use Microsoft Office Outlook or Outlook Express – turn off the email notification popup that appears in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen whenever a new email comes through. It's an unnecessary distraction that will just lead you to lose your train of thought or click on it like Pavlov's Dog responding the bell.

2. Try and limit how often you check your emails and restrict it to certain times of the day. I know this can be very hard to do and I'm not great at it myself but try spending the first 30mins of each day reading and responding to your emails and then closing your email down completely so you can get on with all your other work. You can then go back to your emails just before lunchtime/early afternoon, then again later in the day – each time closing your email down completely.

3. Think much more carefully about how many emails you send and who the recipients should be;

a. If you're a manager, instead of sending lots of emails to the same person (or the team) in one day, perhaps you could save them all up and combine into one, with clear instructions on what you need and when? Some top managers and CEOs only send one email per week and so really make it count.

b. How many emails do you send out in a day? Do you even know? Try counting how many items you have in your sent folder over a period of time and you may be surprised by what you find. Are there any glaringly obvious patterns like a large number of emails to the same person at different times in the day?

c. Do you really need to copy those other people into your emails to someone? Remember, you're giving them more work to do just by reading it. People also seem to have different thoughts about what it means to copy someone else in or to be copied in themselves. Make sure your colleagues understand what is required and whether they need to do anything in response. If they don't need to do anything at all, question whether they really need to be included in the email or if you're just covering your back (a rather sneaky attitude to have).

4. Instead of sending an email, how about picking up the phone or even better walking over the person sitting in the next room, office next door or other part of the building? The break from your desk, slight change of scenery and light exercise will probably do you good, not to mention help build up rapport and improve interpersonal relationships within the team or organisation. This is obviously easier if it's not a negative or difficult topic of conversation but I'd say these are always better done face to face instead of by cowardly email.

5. Unsubscribe from all those newsletters and e-bulletins that you never have time to read, although think carefully before you do this. Have a good hard read through the last one you received to see if there's anything of interest or work out if there could be in the future. If not, click the 'Unsubscribe' link (usually at the bottom of the email) or reply with the words 'Please Unsubscribe' in the title of your email. Personally, I find daily emails annoying, weekly ones OK and monthly ones fine so tend to only subscribe to the latter two types.

6. Turn off all your notification emails from Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and any other website or social media tool you use that will quickly clog up your inbox.

a. Whenever you log in to Facebook (millions of people do this each day) you will see any new notifications, messages or friend requests anyway so why do you need another email which will just distract you from doing 'proper work'? You don't.

b. The same applies to Twitter. The only notification emails I still receive from Twitter are those alerting me to Direct Messages (DMs) as these are questions sent to me by people I know (or are Following) and therefore almost always require a response. Notifications of new Followers are pure vanity and you can always see these next time you login.

c. LinkedIn is a fantastic tool but I find the emails highlighting all the latest 'Group' discussions a bit annoying and so suggest either turning these off completely or reducing the frequency in the Group settings.

7. Google Alerts – if you manage a website or do any kind of PR or digital marketing and promotion for your company there's a very good chance you will have created some Google Alerts. These are useful for keeping tabs on who is talking about you online, but I recommend changing the frequency from 'As It Happens' or 'Daily' to 'Once A Week' which I find is a much better way to monitor your progress.

8. Lastly, one sure fire way to cut down on the number of emails you receive is stop being helpful to others and to never give out your email address or publish it online. Obviously I'm being a little bit mischievous here but on a serious note, it's worth thinking about whether you want people to send you an email, if you can cope with the amount coming in, or if you would prefer them to call the office. This all depends on what type of work you do and the organisation you're in but is worth thinking about.

Further reading on better email management (& etiquette)

For more great tips and advice on how to manage your incoming and outgoing email better, I recommend you read the following;

Seth Godin's Email Checklist

http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2011/06/email-checklist-maybe-this-time-itll-work.html

Chris Anderson (TED/Wired) asks 'Help Create An Email Charter'

<http://tedchris.posterous.com/help-create-an-email-charter>

'Bit Literacy' by Mark Hurst

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B001CLFPMY>

You can also read more tips on better email management and productivity on the 'No Email Day' Facebook Page www.facebook.com/NoEmailDay

Have Your Say and Get Involved!

Please tell me what you think of this manifesto and your thoughts on the [NO EMAIL DAY](#) campaign.

The best way to do this is by 'Liking' the Facebook Page www.facebook.com/NoEmailDay and posting a comment on the 'Wall' or Following us on Twitter [@NoEmailDayHQ](#) and posting a Tweet including the hashtag #noemailday

You can also call me on +44 (0)7734 722 716 or email me at plandigital@live.co.uk (although I won't be checking on 11th November).

Thanks for reading. Now let's start a mini-revolution – just for one day!

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