E-mail and Information Overload Sanity Strategies

Author: Randall F. Dean

Dear Conference Participant:

What follows is a compilation of the e-mail-related tips, suggestions, and techniques I have written about on the topic of e-mail management and e-mail sanity in my monthly e-newsletter, *Timely Tips.* While not comprehensive, these e-mail tips and strategies provide a wealth of resources to help you regain control of your e-mail account and e-mail sanity. Enjoy!

-- *Randy Dean*

PS: You can find the full set of program handouts at the end of this document.

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Timely Tips© Volume 1 Issue 1: September 2004

E-mail Overload

Dear Subscriber:

Welcome to the first issue of the Timely Tips© monthly e-mail. This e-mail will provide you with useful tips and proven strategies to help improve your professional and personal efficiency and effectiveness. Designed to be read in three minutes or less, Timely Tips© will help you find a few extra minutes each day of that precious commodity: Time.

***Timely Tips©:* Volume 1, Issue 1; September, 2004**

<u>E-mail Overload</u> (Part 1)

A recent study conducted by Forrester Research and John Carroll University found that the average professional now spends nearly two hours of each normal workday reading and responding to e-mail. And many professionals regularly report that they often spend half or more (4+ hours) of each workday simply reading and responding to e-mail. Even senior executives are getting caught in the e-mail trap – a recent Harris Interactive/Wall Street Journal Online poll found that C-level executives average five hours per week, or one hour per day, processing e-mail.

As long as the time spent processing e-mail is productive and leads toward the accomplishment of business and personal goals, it is time well spent. But many professionals are finding themselves overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of mail received, as well as the amount of limited or zero-value e-mail (junk, spam, unnecessary CC's, and time-wasting will share some personal messages). This and the next issue of Timely Tips strategies for handling and being more efficient with e-mail. It is not meant to be a fully exhaustive list – instead, look at these tips as some simple starters toward e-mail sanity!

Tip #1: Use Discipline!

Because of the ability to quickly respond to and immediately receive gratification from e-mail, many professionals now spend their entire day checking their e-mail. They may do this while trying to focus on an important project, during an important meeting, or even while taking an important call (yes, the person on the other line CAN hear your hands on the keyboard!!) Of course, if you are checking e-mail numerous times throughout the day, you are probably having difficulty maintaining the required focus on your higher priority projects.

I strongly recommend getting into a habit of checking your work e-mail only 3-4 times per day: once first thing in the morning; again right before and/or after lunch, and finally about one hour prior to the end of your workday. This kind of regimen will allow you to be appropriately responsive to your e-mailers, but still allow you to have solid blocks of time that are uninterrupted by the random, sometimes urgent nature of e-mail. (Another quick tip – make sure others in your office know you are doing this, especially if they have become accustomed to your real-time e-mail replies.)

Tip #2: Follow a Three-Minute Processing Rule

Another bad habit that many professionals get into is to let a bunch of little e-mails stack up in their inbox. I personally follow a 3-minute rule when it comes to e-mail. I decide when I open up an e-mail (every single one!) that I am making a commitment to decide what I am doing with that e-mail in three minutes or less. That means if I can, in three minutes or less, I will review the e-mail and archive it, respond to it, forward it with more info, or delete it. If I can't do one of those activities in three minutes or less, then I will print the e-mail so I can process it into my workflow and deal with it at an appropriate, prioritized time. (I use a similar system to handle voice mails, snail mails, and other documents that cross my desk.)

By doing this, I am greatly reducing the amount of clutter in my e-mail inbox, which makes it much easier for me to stay focused and productive. I actually have a goal at the end of each day to have an empty inbox, which tells me that every single e-mail that needed a response or an action got one. If you are like many professionals that have let literally hundreds of e-mails build up in your inbox, you have one of two choices: 1) delete everything in your inbox that is more than a week old and start over (processing your e-mail in the right way); 2) or, bite the bullet, and block a day on your calendar to go through all of those old e-mails and follow the three minute rule. Either way, you will feel your overwhelm drop and your sanity return by following these two simple strategies.

Next post, we'll share a couple more good strategies to help you become a more efficient and effective e-mailer.

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Timely Tips: Volume 1, Issue 2; October, 2004: E-mail Overload (Part 2)

Last month, we discussed a few tips for making your "email experience" more efficient and effective. We recommended that you use discipline and only check your e-mail 3-4 times per day, and also that you follow a three-minute processing rule (if you can read it, file it, respond to it, forward it, archive it, or delete it in three minutes or less, take care of that email RIGHT NOW!) This month, we're going to stay on the "effective email" topic, and share a few more tips to save time and energy on email, particularly when dealing with spam.

SPAM Strategies

Spam, or simply unsolicited (and mostly unwanted) email, has become both ubiquitous and also highly wasteful for individuals and organizations. Thousands of hours of productivity are lost each year due to spam, and many scarce dollars are going into systems that help to stop the flow of spam into companies. According to IDG News Service, the amount of spam has increased by more than 40% this year alone. Nearly 500,000 spam messages are sent every single day, accounting for nearly 17% of all messages sent. Some organizations are even reporting that 25% or more of all email received is spam. About 1% of those messages are also infected with a virus, thus making spam messages even more dangerous and costly.

While most larger organizations have formal efforts in place to help stop the flow of spam, there are a number of things that you can do individually to help stop this flow also. These strategies may also help you save time when reviewing and responding to email on a daily basis, and of course they will help your company's bottom line.

1. ***Never open an email that you suspect is spam.*** The act of opening the email often sends a message back to the spammer that reports to them that the email is "live". They may then sell your email address to other spammers, thus potentially overloading your account with spam. Plus, when you open the probable spam, you potentially open your account to a virus. The best thing to do is to simply delete the message, or follow the steps in strategy #4 below.

2. ***Never use your work email address as a response address for any internet accounts or online purchases.*** If you do this, you are increasing the likelihood that an unscrupulous person or organization will get your "live" email address, and add it to their spam list. The best way to sign up for internet offers and purchases is to follow strategy #3 below:
3. ***Have a dedicated personal email account SOLELY for responding to internet offers and making internet purchases.*** There are several free email services out there, including Yahoo!, Google, and Hotmail. I recommend that you start one of those accounts for these kinds of activities, and ONLY use this account for these kinds of activities. If you also want a personal email account for family and friends, start yet another account. (yes, like telephone numbers, we are now in the world of multiple email accounts – a work account, a personal account, and a "spam protection" account.)
4. ***Take the time to use any spam filters that you have access to.*** If your company allows you to report or forward spam, do just that. Even though it takes an extra moment, if your company has an active spam monitoring program and individuals do their part to report spam, over time, the amount of spam that will get through the filter will drop dramatically. Look at this as an investment in a cleaner email box in the near future. Follow the same strategy with your personal email accounts. For instance, Yahoo! email has a very easy-to-use spam filter – anytime that you receive a message that is spam, you can simply mark it by clicking the "spam" button, and the message will be removed from your email inbox and put in your trash folder. If you want to review these messages, you even have the option of setting up a "bulk" folder in Yahoo!, where these messages will automatically be forwarded, as well as any other messages that Yahoo! suspects are spam.
5. ***As a last resort, if you simply cannot get control of the spam in your work email, contact your system administrator, and ask for a new email address.*** This is never a fun step to take, because it then requires you to send a note to all of

your contacts to let them know you have a new address. You may also have to monitor both email accounts for 2-4 weeks to make sure you aren't missing important messages, but if spam has made your email unwieldy, it is a step that should be considered. If it is your personal account that gets out of control, a similar (albeit painful) solution should be considered. If, when you start over and receive this new account, you follow strategies 1-4 above, you will hopefully never have to get ANOTHER replacement work or personal email account.

One very nice benefit of having multiple email accounts is that it helps you with knowing what is an urgent or important email. If you know that you are being a good steward of your work email account, you can have more confidence that the messages in your inbox merit your attention. The same can be said for your personal email account. And your "spam-catcher" account may only merit occasional infrequent attention.

The whole reason for doing this is to help save time and make your actions more efficient and effective. You can continue to check your work email account 3-4 times a day, as we recommended in the previous issue, check your personal email account only once or twice a day (for instance, before work, during lunch, or after work), and only check your "spam-catcher" account infrequently (when you have recently made an online order or requested internet information).

Another important reason to consider following the multiple account strategy is because it could actually help you professionally. In a recent American Management Association study, 80% of companies responded that they now actively monitor the electronic activities (including email and weblogs) of their employees. Another study by the Society of Human Resource Management found that 75% of large companies actively review individual emails. If you are getting lots of inappropriate email in your work account (either personal or spam), it could actually put your livelihood in jeopardy. By having these separate accounts, you resist the temptation of effectively "stealing time" from your employer for personal purposes. You can also notify friends and relatives that you will only read their emails if they send it to your personal account, thus keeping you focused on the task at hand – building your employer's business.

And, of course, won't it be nice to stop reading about the great benefits of cheap Viagra, or those wonderful offers for $63 million dollars from a bank in Nigeria?

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Timely Tips©: Volume 1, Issue 3; November 2004 -- A Three-Minute Clutter Buster

One of the favorite time-savings tips that I share in my seminars is one of the oldest time management habits that I follow. I learned this very helpful tip on managing information overload from time management guru David Allen in the early '90's, and I've followed it religiously since I first learned it. It is just as valuable today as it was when I first learned it, and the thing that is great about this tip is that it is so simple – simple to understand, simple to implement, and simple to use.

This simple but powerful habit is called the "three minute rule". Here's how the three minute rule works. Every day, first thing in the morning, I collect all of the new pieces of information that have come into my office since the previous day (voice mails, emails, snail mail, papers and documents, faxes, articles to read, etc.), and I then consider each and every one and make a quick decision. My decision rule is this: can I process this piece of information in three minutes or less (meaning, can I read it, forward it, file it, delete it, toss it, archive it, or complete it in three minutes or less)? If yes, I do it RIGHT NOW. If no, I then put it into a prioritized pile of information, with the most important and urgent item at the very top of that pile.

By taking care of the myriad of little three minute tasks that come in each and every day, I do myself a great service by getting rid of a great deal of the clutter on my desk each day. I keep the little stuff moving, and I handle it quickly and efficiently first thing in the morning. And then, once all of these little things are off my desk, I am now free to work on and focus on the more important and time-intensive tasks and appointments for the rest of the day. And I am not distracted by all these little piles of little "to do's" sitting all over my desk asking for my attention. Plus, my co-workers and clients are happy, because I respond to their little requests in an appropriately timely manner. Things don't get stalled on my desk.

I’ve been following this rule for years, so now my process is quick and automatic. Usually, I get through my three-minute pile in an hour or less (sometimes significantly less). And thus I am allowed to focus on the higher-level value added activities with more time and energy, which improves my performance and productivity. It has made a big difference in my life. But when I first started following this rule, I did go through a little transition period.

The Conversion Process

I had several large piles of mostly little tasks (with a few big and important tasks mixed in) all over my desk, and my e-mail inbox was quite full. What I decided to do was block my calendar one day, and put all of these separate piles into one big pile, and print out all of the emails in my inbox. I then took each item one at a time, and spent an entire day knocking out as many little three minute tasks as I could. I put every item that would take longer than three minutes into a separate single pile. The people in my office thought I was a bit crazy that day, as I was running all over the place getting a million of these little 3-minute things done. Plus, I probably sent out about 50 emails that day, all to people that had been waiting too long for a quick little reply to something. I was surprised by how much of the stuff in my office I could just throw away or delete. And when all was said and done, I think I knocked out about 85% of the stuff that had gathered in my office.

The next day, I spent significantly less time doing three minute tasks – I had them under control now. And I took that pile of tasks and activities that would take more than three minutes, and organized it into my new “Priority Processing” box. I had the items in this box organized with the most important and urgent items on top, and the least important items on the bottom. Now, not only did I no longer have a million little distractions in my office, I also was clear on what was the most important thing for me to be working on.

I hope you can see the value of this habit, and how it could greatly reduce your clutter and your stress, and also greatly increase your productivity. Now that you are coming into a holiday week, could this be a good week to block your calendar for half a day, and knock out all of your three minute tasks? You’ll be surprised at how much it clears your mind, and you might even be able to see what color your desk and credenza are again!

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Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 8; August 2006: A Handy Junk/SPAM E-mail Time-Saver

The great thing about leading programs on time management and personal organization all around the country is that I get to occasionally learn a few really good tips from the people that attend my programs. This month, I have to give a big “thanks” to Nancy from Boston for her e-mail tip that has become this month’s Timely Tip. It is a very simple tip that helps MS Outlook users deal with spam and junk e-mail in their inbox.

The tip is a simple tip to use whenever you receive a “junk” or “spam” e-mail in your Outlook inbox, especially for those messages that you are suspicious may harbor illicit content, malicious spyware, or possible viruses. Most of us have learned the “Double Delete” strategy (delete from inbox, then delete again from your deleted items box also, so the message is knocked completely out of your system and thus cannot infect or harm your system). This tip helps you “shortcut” that process:

Rather than hitting the delete key to delete the message, and then going into your deleted items folder to delete the message again, instead just hit the “Shift” and “Delete” keys simultaneously. This will completely eliminate the message from your e- mail account in one step. (When you do this, Outlook will ask you if you are sure you want to fully delete – just click “Yes” or just hit "Enter", and that message is GONE.)

If you are a user of other popular e-mail management tool, such as Lotus Notes or GroupWise, this same technique should work for you too if you are on a PC platform.

Now, no more need to “Double Delete” – just blast those junk e-mails right out of your box once and for all!

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 11; November 2006:

Call Your E-mails (Part 1)

Keeping up with the craziness of a holiday week, I'd like to give everyone a short but sweet common sense time saver related to your e-mail. This is a tip I've been sharing in my "Taming the E-mail Beast" course, and is a great reminder for all of us to stay focused on efficiency and effectiveness when utilizing ANY communication tool.

The tip is simply this -- when you receive (or are about to send) an e-mail communication that is "fraught for misinterpretation", consider greatly whether e-mail is even the best option for making the communication. If you believe e-mail is going to create a "chain of miscommunication", meaning that you and the original sender/receiver are going to trade multiple e-mails trying to figure out what each other are saying, then maybe the smarter thing to do is actually pick up the phone or even just go find the person. I know it is an amazing concept, but, yes, you can actually have a live conversation with a person rather than simply send an e-mail! If the live conversation can help clear up the confusion, then the five minutes in conversation is a much more efficient and effective communication tool than trading numerous e-mails several times throughout the day, each taking a few minutes to read and respond to.

Now, I know this seems like a "no-brainer", but every single time I teach my time management and e-mail courses, I have people tell me about these frustrating and seemingly never ending e-mail "loops", where people are obviously miscommunicating, and yet no one thinks about "cutting off the loop", picking up the phone, and resolving the miscommunication or misunderstanding. I'm asking everyone to build an e-mail miscommunication "radar screen" and identify when they are in an inefficient e- mail loop, and then take the action to cut off the loop and solve the miscommunication via a phone call or personal contact.

I know -- this isn't rocket science -- but if you can get into the habit of cutting off those loops, you will literally save hours of time, and also tons of aggravation, by clearing up the miscommunications in a live conversational setting.

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 12; December 2006:

Call Your E-mails (Part 2)

Last month, I gave you the tip to consider calling people rather than e-mailing them if the material is confusing, easily misunderstood, or possibly contentious. Many of you responded that this was a great common sense tip, and have started not only using it, but have started training others in your office to do the same. This month's is of a similar "common sense" nature. It is specifically designed for PDA/smart phone users that can get their e-mail on their mobile device. And here's the tip:

If you receive an e-mail on your PDA/smart phone device, and the required response is fairly simple and straightforward, rather than replying or forwarding the e-mail using your device, consider calling the sender/receiver with your response. Here's why: typing information into PDAs and smart phones is typically slow and inefficient for most users. For most people, it is nowhere near as quick as you can type on a regular full-size keyboard, and that is nowhere near as quick as you can talk! If the response is quick and clear, and you are on the road/mobile, just call the person and give them the response/info they need.

And if you are really smart (and really busy!), call with your e-mail response at a time when your receiver might not be at their phone – then you can just leave a quick message in their voice mail, and not risk a drawn-out conversation. That's why I often call people at 7:30 a.m. (before people get in their office), at lunchtime (when they are away from their desk), and after 6:00 p.m. (when they are on the way home – hey, isn't this another Timely Tip in and of itself??). This strategy of calling my e- mails and catching people's voice mails allows me to be VERY efficient –- avoiding the slow typing of my PDA device, and also avoiding unnecessary conversation. (By the way, I do encourage you to also occasionally call when there is a GOOD chance people WILL be at their desks. Sometimes a live conversation with a friend/colleague/coworker is a beautiful thing!)

One final little tip: I noticed that when I read e- mails in my Blackberry, if the person sending the e- mail has a phone number in the text of the message or in their e-mail signature, my Blackberry will automatically highlight that number, and then I have the option to just click my “thumbwheel” and make the phone call directly from the e-mail. You should check to see if your PDA/smart phone device has the same capability. This can also save you a few seconds of time!

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Timely Tips© Volume 4, Issue 5; May 2007: Set Your E-mail's Auto Send/Receive for Every 60-90 Minutes

Several months ago, I wrote a Timely Tips that strongly recommended that you not "bling" -- meaning that you avoid the bad habit of constantly checking and reading e-mails as they come in. This is a very damaging habit in regards to your overall productivity, as you basically spend the majority of your time dealing with small-level urgency items rather than putting necessary effort on your bigger, more important tasks, projects, and activities.

One of the things many of us do that contributes to the bad habit of "blinging" is having our settings for "Auto Send/Receive" in our e-mail account set too frequently. I know many professionals that have their "Auto Send/Receive" set for every 5-10 minutes. Of course, if your e-mail software is set to check every 5-10 minutes, you will be receiving messages all throughout the day. And, if you are easily distracted, every time your e-mail checks and delivers new messages (with the accompanying "blinging" sound -- thus the term "bling"), you will likely jump from what you are doing, lose your train of thought, and check these new messages. Every time you do this, you lose your focus and your forward progress on your projects and tasks.

There is an easy solution for this -- namely, adjust your "Auto Send/Receive" settings in your e-mail account to a time frame significantly longer than every 5-10 minutes. Preferably, you'll set your "Auto Send/Receive" settings to 60-90 minutes or more. If you aren't constantly getting new e-mails, it sure is a lot easier to keep your focus on your designated projects and/or tasks. I personally have my "Auto Send/Receive" set at 90 minutes, and I don't feel I've lost my appropriate responsiveness at all. It just allows me to be more proactive and maintain my focus.

Of course, every e-mail software program has a different method for changing your "Auto Send/Receive" settings. Here's how I changed mine in Outlook 2003:

* First, go to your "Tools" drop down on your menu bar

* Then, go to "Options"

* Select "Mail Setup"

* Then, go into "Send/Receive"

* Then, adjust your settings in your "Schedule Automatic Send/Receive Every _____ Minutes" to 60, 90, 120 or more minutes, and then hit "Close".

In Outlook, it is that simple. Figure out how to do the same in your e-mail program, and now you can avoid the continuing new message distractions and help yourself avoid this damaging "blinging" mentality and behavior. And now you might actually get some bigger items knocked off your list, and feel more in control of your work and life. Good luck!!

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Timely Tips October 2007: A Third E-mail Account?

A Tip from Randy's New Book: *Taming the E-mail Beast: 45 Key Strategies for Better Managing Your E-mail Overload (and Regaining Your E-mail Sanity!)*

As you know, I've been working feverishly on bringing a new book to market that details my key strategies for better managing your e-mail activities. In coming months, I'm planning on sharing several tips from this book as my Timely Tips for that month. The first tip is a pretty simple tip that I recommend all readers consider: having a third e-mail account that would act as your Internet/E-commerce account (your first two accounts would be your professional, work-related account and your personal e-mail account for messages with your family and friends). The basic reason for having this account: to have an e-mail account you can use for all of your e-commerce/Internet activities where you need to submit a valid e-mail address to complete your Internet/e-commerce transactions. Having this third account allows you to keep your work and personal accounts more "hidden" from junk and spam e-mail providers.

To read the more complete excerpt on this third account from Taming the E-mail Beast: 45 Key Strategies for Better Managing Your E-mail Overload (and Regaining Your E-mail Sanity), visit this page:

http://randalldean.com/timelytips1007_tamingemailexcerpt.html

Timely Tips November 2007: "Drag & Drop" to Create New Tasks

A Tip from Randy's New Book: *Taming the E-mail Beast: 45 Key Strategies for Better Managing Your E-mail Overload (and Regaining Your E-mail Sanity!)*

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One of the key tips I share in my new book is how to very quickly create new tasks in Microsoft Outlook, by using "drag and drop" to pull an active e-mail and drop it onto your Outlook task function to auto-create a new task. Here's how it works: if you have an
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e-mail that has an embedded task that you need to complete, simply select the e-mail (usually a single left click) -- but keep holding down the left mouse button, and then drag the e-mail over to your "Tasks" icon in your Outlook Shortcuts view, and drop onto that icon.

What Outlook does is pretty cool -- it then automatically creates a new task based off of the information in that e-mail. The subject of the task will be the subject of the e-mail -- I usually type over the e-mail title with the actual description of the task. You will also note that the body text of the e-mail now appears in the notes field near the bottom of the open task window -- thus, you have all of the relevant related information from the e-mail handy. Simply select a due date, and, if you so choose, a category for your task, hit "Save and Close", and you've generated a new task with additional useful information in a very quick manner and form.

Play around with this -- you can also drag and drop e-mails into your Calendar icon to create new calendar events, and also into your Address Book to automatically create new contacts. I find it a very handy way to definitely save time in this very common business/technology function.

Timely Tips May 2008: The Shift & CTRL Keys as E-mail "Organizers"

Use the Shift and CTRL keys to Select and File Related Groups of E-mail Messages

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This is another tip I share in my new e-book, Taming the E-mail Beast: 45 Key Strategies for Better Managing Your E-mail Overload. It really helps when trying to clean up a messy e-mail account, by allowing you to quickly select and move related messages to appropriate folders (or delete them!)

Here's how it works in MS Outlook:

Most people know how to sort messages in the Outlook e-mail tool by clicking on the
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"To/From", "Subject", "Date Received/Sent", or "Size" tabs at the top of the general e-mail screen. Simply click on any one of these headers, and all of your e-mails in that folder will suddenly sort top to bottom for that specific category, just like a sort works in MS Excel (for all of you spreadsheet experts out there). Click on the same header again, and now the sort will be from bottom to top.

What happens when you do this is that you will get "like" messages all grouped together. For instance, if you had an e-mail from me, Randy Dean, selected, and then you clicked on the "From" header or tab, you will likely see all of my e-mails in a group right next to each other. Above them, you'll have all of your e-mails from Rance Gibson, and below you'll have all of the e-mails from Rascal Stephens (alpha sort above and below). Let's now suppose that all of those e-mails from yours truly could now be put into a single file folder in your e-mail account, as all of the e-mails you receive from me are related to a single project we are working on together. The slow way to move those e-mails is obviously moving them one at a time from your inbox folder to the appropriate subfolder for the project.

A better way is to use the Shift key. Select the very top message from "Randy Dean" using a single left click, then hold down the Shift key, then scroll to the bottom "Randy Dean" message and select (again with a single left click). You'll see that your Outlook (and I believe GroupWise and LotusNotes works the same way too -- Timely Tips readers, please confirm!) has now highlighted ALL of the Randy Dean messages as a single group. Now, you can move your mouse up over the selected group of messages, click and hold your left mouse button, and then you can drag and drop the entire group of messages "en masse" into the appropriate project folder. Test it out -- it is a pretty cool way to move lots of related e-mail messages in very little time!

Now, you can also use the CTRL key to do a similar action, but with the CTRL key, you can actually select messages that are "discontiguous". Do the same sort, get all of the "Randy" messages together, but this time, you need to split these messages between two e-mail project folders. Easy! Select the top message with a single left click just as before, but now hold down the CTRL key. Doing this, you can now click on each individual message that you want to move, and create a discontiguous group of messages to be filed "en masse" into the appropriate project folder. (By the way, these same basic Shift and CTRL selection capabilities work in many Microsoft and other business software programs, like Excel, Word, etc. -- test them out sometime.)

Using these two excellent strategies, you can select and move lots of related e-mails very quickly and efficiently. Give it a try!

Timely Tips June 2008: An Awesome E-mail/E-Commerce Tip

Thanks to John at the Affordable Meetings Conference for the "Mailinator" Tip!

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So, I had just gotten done doing my "Taming E-mail" session at the Affordable Meetings West conference in Long Beach, California this June, when John, one of the program attendees, comes up and says, "Hey Randy -- great session on getting that e-mail under control. Have you used "mailinator" yet? It's awesome!"

Now, of course, that question made my ears perk up. "Mailinator -- no. I haven't heard of that before. What's that?"

"Oh, it's great. It is a web site that allows you to create bogus e-mail names so you can get access to stuff on the web without having to give out your real e-mail addresses. You just create a bogus e-mail address like randy@mailinator.com, and mailinator will accept any messages sent to that address for you (http://www.mailinator.com also provides several other usable e-mail domain names too, like "@mailin8r.com"). It is a live public e-mail address that actually works. You can monitor mailinator.com to watch for the reply e-mails you need info from, and then you can forget about it. They'll never get your
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real e-mail, and you can get access to the free information and content you want from the web, without having to accept all of the follow-up crazy junk e-mail and spam that many of these online content providers are famous for."

I thought, "Wow -- that's awesome!" I don't know how many times I've seen a "free report" or "special podcast" out on the web that I would've liked to have gained access to, but I didn't because I simply didn't want the provider to get my e-mail address. Now, through mailinator, I can gain access to that information, yet keep my electronic privacy.

Now, of course, you don't want to use mailinator for financial transactions or for e-mail activities where you are sharing valid personal information, passwords, etc. The e-mails received by mailinator are posted publicly, so you want to make sure any information shared/received is generic. But it sure does give you a great option for getting that "Top 5 Things to Make You Amazing at (Insert Hobby/Passion Here)" report on the web. Check out http://www.mailinator.com today, and make it a part of your e-commerce, web/info routine.

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