

# **Time-Saving Techniques Prevent E-Mail Overload**

## **By Michael Angelo Caruso**

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If you’re struggling to keep up with an onslaught of e-mail, you’re not alone. More than 511 billion electronic messages were sent in 2000. This saved lots of people time and money – in theory, at least. Despite its advantages, e-mail can be difficult to manage. At times, electronic messaging can be downright oppressive. Fortunately, there are several easy steps you can take to prevent your mailbox from being overrun.

### **Stop Spam**

Your first step should be to download a spam-detection program. This tool prevents advertisers’ bulk mail from entering your in-box. Most internet service providers provide this service free of charge. Earthlink’s program is called Spaminator and Yahoo offers Spamguard.

These programs screen messages by detecting certain words in the incoming message that might indicate spam. The most serious by-products of spam are worms and computer viruses, which can harm your operating system. By subscribing to an anti-virus service and updating your virus definitions regularly, you can minimize spam-related problems. Another idea is to use a free e-mail service like Hotmail.com when giving your address to anyone who is likely to solicit you later.

### **Delete suspicious messages**

Many forwarded e-mails contain info that you simply aren’t obligated to read. Do not open these messages. Delete messages with generic subject lines, messages that have been forwarded from a third party and e-mail that otherwise look suspicious. It is most important to not open attachments from strangers or someone you don’t trust. Another tip: Don’t contribute to the burgeoning volume of e-mail by forwarding generic messages to everyone in *your* address book.

### **Turn down the volume**

A constant stream of incoming and outgoing e-mail demands a process for receiving, storing and replying to the messages. Your goal is to limit the time spent on unimportant messages while simultaneously prioritizing each piece of mail you receive.

When I receive 50 e-mails at a time, I first delete all “fwd” messages and any subject heading in capital letters (a characteristic of junk e-mails). Next, I open remaining e-mails and glance at the body of the message to note any time-sensitive messages. If I need to respond right away, I click “reply” to immediately create an outgoing message.

If my reply is short or time-sensitive, I'll send it right away. If my response will take time to compose or if I want to send it later, I'll save the message as a draft, which cues the message for me to send at another time. Non-prioritized messages and insignificant missives will reside in my "in" box until I'm ready to deal with them. Using the above process, I can prioritize 50 messages in less than 10 minutes.

### **To print or not to print?**

A good way to battle the printing urge is to know your computer better. Learn how to search e-mails by sender, date and subject categories. Learn how to create folders for storing e-mail by topic.

While hard drives, zip drives, memory sticks and on-line storage sites offer enough space to store every e-mail you receive, saving it all is overkill. Keep messages for about a year, unless they are critical.

### **A quick reply**

Save text that you frequently keystroke in a place you can easily access. Copy and paste that chunk of text into outgoing messages. For example, after the 11 September terrorist attacks, dozens of friends and family members sent e-mails asking if I was safe.

I wanted to provide everyone a detailed update of my perspective on the horrible events. I was in Pittsburgh on September 11, 2001, not far from where United Airlines flight #93 crashed. Time didn't permit me to provide individual answers so here's what I did.

In response to these thoughtful messages, I personalized the subject line and then typed a customized greeting. Next, I pasted in the pre-written chunk of text, starting with: "Things are good for me. I've had a very easy time compared to some folks." I added a quick personal close to each message before clicking "send."

Remember that for all of its ubiquity and convenience, e-mail is a one-way message that can never take the place of interpersonal communication. Sometimes, it's more effective to simply pick up the phone and talk.

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