

The
www
of
Mastering
Your Email



Stuart Snooks

— CEO —

Solutions For Success

☎ 1300 789 468 | 🌐 www.steuartsnooks.com.au

Mastering Your E-mail



3 **life-changing** strategies that will revolutionise the way you work

These days, e-mail is central to almost everything that happens in an organization. It has largely replaced communications that used to be made face-to-face or by phone. In addition to communication, it is a major method of brokering tasks and workload.

As a result, most people have been (or still are) overloaded and overwhelmed with e-mail and all its demands. Even those who are not overwhelmed feel that they are only just surviving, rather than thriving, when it comes to controlling their e-mail. Very few feel that they are effective and I am yet to meet someone who feels they have achieved Mastery of their e-mail. (See e-mail Mastery model on next page)

From my many years of research and experience working with thousands of people across a wide range of industries, I have found that there are 3 key strategies needed to get control of e-mail and use it in an effective and productive way. They are what I call the WWW of Mastering E-mail - the When, What and Where.

This white paper explains each of these strategies. What you learn could revolutionise the way you use e-mail and change the way you work...forever!

Happy reading!

Stewart

Mastering Your E-mail

1 WHEN should you check e-mail?

The #1 strategy for mastering information overload in general, and e-mail overload in particular, is getting control of WHEN you check your in-box.

Schedule times to check your e-mail

As Nathan Zeldes writes in his recent [‘Solutions to Information Overload: The Definitive Guide’](#);

“This is probably the single most important change an individual can adopt to improve their state vis-a-vis personal information overload”

When his 20+ years of research lead him to conclude that the single most important strategy for overcoming overload is to **‘read e-mail only in predefined daily time slots’**, we should take notice.

And it’s not just Nathan. Timothy Ferriss, author of the bestselling [‘The Four Hour Workweek’](#), states that:

“This habit alone can change your life. It seems small but has an enormous effect”



Mastering Your E-mail

And my own research, combined with years of experience gained from working with thousands of busy professionals here in Australia, leads me to the same conclusion.

You will be far more productive by checking e-mail in a scheduled block of uninterrupted time ('single-tasking') rather than checking it every few minutes or whenever they arrive.

“So much of the productivity damage that e-mail does occurs not because of ‘what’ the e-mail is but ‘when’ it arrives”

Turn off all e-mail alerts

A critical part of this strategy of 'checking e-mail only at designated times' is to turn off all e-mail alerts – both the audible and the visual. You want to be 'blissfully ignorant' of the exact moment each e-mail arrives but also have 'peace of mind' knowing exactly when you will get to them. You will be amazed (and delighted) at just how much difference this makes to your productivity and sense of being in control.

Now, you might be one of many who fear that, by having all e-mail alerts turned off, you will miss something urgent. However, e-mail was never designed as a tool for synchronous communications (and doesn't work well when we try to use it that way). We have much better tools for those type of synchronous messages – instant messaging, SMS or even a phone call. If you absolutely must be available to your immediate boss or number 1 client, then you can set up a rule that allows alerts when these specific people send you e-mail.



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Manage other people's expectations

Given that so many others have grown to expect rapid e-mail responses from you, it would be wise to manage their expectations on when you respond, now that your alerts are off.

This can be done in a number of ways.

1. Explain this verbally to those you work closely with.
2. Send a short message explaining your new e-mail policy, advising that you only check e-mail at certain times of the day and letting others know how to get through to you for time sensitive or urgent messages, using a more appropriate communication tool such as IM, Skype, ringing your mobile – whatever works best for you.
3. Add a PS to your signature block on outgoing messages to reinforce this policy on an ongoing basis. Your PS could say something like this;

*P.S. I am not always at my desk but do check my e-mail 3-4 times per day.
If your matter is truly urgent, please contact me directly on my mobile number.*

Some colleagues may become frustrated they can no longer get the instant response they used to get from you. But if you communicate that your new policy helps you be more productive and that they can still reach you with truly urgent messages by using your preferred channel, they will soon adapt to your new, more effective way of working and communicating.



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2

WHAT to do with each e-mail?

This strategy is the master skill for getting your in-box empty and keeping it under control!

Mastering the WHAT of E-mail Overload

One of the biggest productivity problems with e-mail is that we often read the same e-mail message 2, 3, 5 or even 10 times BEFORE taking action on it! Even then, the message is still often left in the in-box!

The way to avoid this problem (and the huge amount of extra and unnecessary handling of e-mails) is to make it a rule to handle each message just once. After all, your time is simply too valuable to ever look at an e-mail more than once. This deliberate strategy will **eliminate as much as 80% of the double-handling** of each individual e-mail message.

The inbox is simply a decision-making environment. Once actioned, an e-mail should be moved out of the inbox. The aim should be to empty the inbox at least once a day and preferably each time it is visited - see my article on [7 Reasons to Keep the Inbox Empty](#).

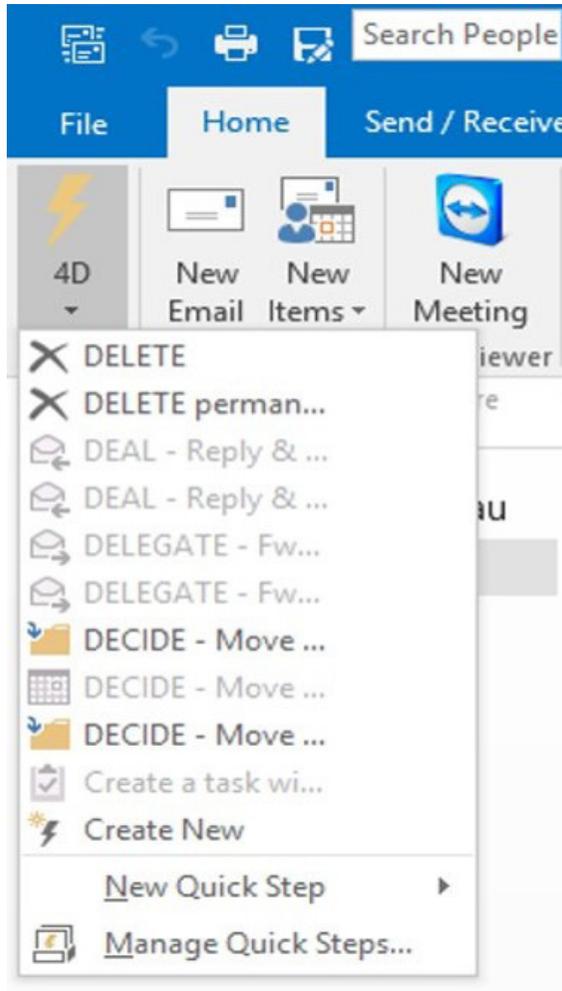
The way to do this is simply to **make a decision** by asking yourself;

1. What is the NEXT action to be taken on this message?
2. How long will that action take?

Your answer to these two questions will then determine which action is needed to process each e-mail.



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Of course, many e-mails will require multiple actions but the key is to identify the very next single action that you can take (that doesn't rely on somebody or something else). Simply taking this action keeps the e-mail moving and is often the catalyst to completing further actions needed with the e-mail.

The way to do it is to use is the 4D method. Most of the world's productivity gurus have advocated making one of 4 (sometimes 5) decisions on any new input you receive. This applies to anything that comes your way via the in-tray, voice-mail, newsletter, news item or, in this case, the in-box.

The 4D Methodology

The 4 Decisions

- 1: Delete
- 2: Deal (<2 mins)
- 3: Delegate
- 4: Decide

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The good news is that there are only ever one of four actions we need to take on any given e-mail, as follows;

1: DELETE

If there is no action needed and you don't need to keep the message, simply delete it (eg: spam, jokes, information you no longer need, etc). This applies to 3 types of messages;

1. **SPAM** - unsolicited messages
2. **BACON** - 75% of these messages (also known as 'grey' mail) are called spam but you actually gave out your e-mail address to access on-line shopping or an app or banking etc, so it's not technically spam.
3. **Transactional messages** - relevant to your role but of low or no value and no need to keep on file

2: DEAL with it NOW (less than 2 mins)

If you can take the next action (reply or forward, update a document, schedule a meeting etc) in two minutes or less, it's quicker to do it now than the time it takes to store the message, track it, retrieve it, read it, get up to speed on it, make a decision and then do it later.

Oftentimes, you can actually complete two, three, four or more actions on an e-mail in under 2 minutes - it's amazing how much you can do in 2 minutes of highly focused thinking and activity (especially when you're uninterrupted)



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3: DELEGATE

If the next action would be better done by somebody else, you can either forward the message onto the appropriate person, print it and hand it to them physically, or (if you're a good user of Tasks) add it to your Task list and then use the **Assign a Task** function to e-mail it to them (with the option to keep track of it in your own Task list).

4: DECIDE

Some call this action Defer and it applies when the next action on the e-mail can be moved to another place or time, as follows;

- **WHERE:** If no further action is required but this is an e-mail you must keep (ie: you can't delete it), you can file it in one of your e-mail folders, just as you would file a piece of paper or document in a physical filing cabinet/system.

Alternatively, you can file the e-mail along with an existing Task, Appointment or Contact that is already in your e-mail software (eg: you can copy an e-mail with a meeting agenda or other relevant documents and paste it into a meeting appointment that is already set up in your calendar). This way, what you need sits in the appropriate place until the appropriate time.

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- **WHEN:** For e-mails that will take more than 2-5 minutes to process (ie: these are actually tasks that have arrived via e-mail), convert the e-mail to a new Appointment in the Calendar (ie: schedule when you are going to do the work that has arrived via e-mail). This process forces you to think about and answer 3 questions that help you have much greater control of the task. The first is;
 1. How long do I need to complete this?
 2. When have I got time free in my calendar?
 3. Of the free times, which would be the best for this task given the context of the rest of my schedule of commitments and activities?
- **WAIT:** For those e-mails where you have to wait on *someone* or *something* else before you can further action the e-mail, add it to a Waitlist, Watchlist or Pending Reply folder as no further action is possible right now. Before you move it to this folder, be sure to add a reminder if so that while it is out of mind (ie: it doesn't distract you by sitting in the inbox) it is not out of control.

Once you have processed each message using this 4D process there are none left in your inbox! However, with the number in your inbox right now, you might not be able to achieve inbox zero in one sitting. In this case, what you can do is set up a separate folder, called Backlog folder and move all the contents of the inbox to this folder. Then set a recurring calendar appointment with yourself on a recurring basis to come back to this Backlog folder and process all the e-mail, using the 4D method. The key to staying in control is to make this time the last 15 minutes of your day and add a reminder to 'nag' you to attend to this 'chore'.

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3 The WHERE of Mastering E-mail

The #3 strategy for mastering e-mail overload is understanding WHERE to quickly file e-mail away from the inbox and be able to quickly retrieve it when needed.

Mastering the WHERE of E-mail Overload

Once actioned, an e-mail should be moved out of the inbox. However, many people leave their e-mails in the inbox these days, for a number of reasons;

- it takes too long to file them away in an e-mail folder
- they not sure where to file the e-mail
- there may be more than one folder the e-mail could be filed in
- they think it's easier to find it again later if it is left in the inbox

Principle # 1 – Separate 'completed' from 'incomplete'

The first principle for controlling the WHERE of Mastering E-mail is to separate finished or completed e-mails from those that are unfinished or incomplete, in the same way that 'completed' paperwork, documents and files are moved out of the working and decision-making environment (ie: your desk) and placed in a filing system, shelf or cabinet of some sort.



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Principle # 2 – Simplify your e-mail folder structure

Simplifying your e-mail folder structure will make it quicker and easier to use. Most of us have been using e-mail for many years, adding folders, sub-folders and sub-sub-folders over time and developing a complicated structure with a large number of folders; some have a very large number! The first step is to better structure or simplify all these folders.



Just as we take a file or document and put it into a filing cabinet when we've finished working on it, we can do the same with e-mail. And when we place a document into the filing cabinet, we don't put it just anywhere but we tend to go to drawer of the filing cabinet first and then to a specific folder.

We can do the same with e-mail by setting up a Primary Folder called Filing Cabinet and 4 subfolders as follows;

1. **External** – clients, suppliers
2. **Internal** – departments, personnel
3. **Projects** – subject matter, outputs
4. **Admin** – rosters, payroll, accounts

Once this filing cabinet has been set up you can drag n' drop your existing e-mail folders into the appropriate drawer. You will now have no less folders but a much better structure that is far quicker and easier to use.

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The second step is to consolidate these folders as you move them to the Filing Cabinet. Instead of having 15 files under the Client folder, take the contents of each file and place them all into a single Client folder. This reduces the number of folders from 15 to just 1. You can then start finding individual e-mails by using either;

- the Sort function for each column (Sent by, Received from, Date received, Size etc)
- the Search function (simply type in a name, topic, keyword etc)

The search functionality in modern e-mail software is becoming increasingly powerful and we should take advantage of this.

The third step is to reduce everything down to just one single folder for storing all e-mail. The ultimate example of this is Google. Most people think of google as a search engine. But when you think it about, Google is simply one big filing cabinet . . . that comes with a powerful search engine!

Summary

So, that's the third W of the WWW of Mastering E-mail. By getting control of **WHEN** you address e-mail, **WHAT** you do with each message and **WHERE** you file it, you can begin to master your e-mail and save an enormous amount of time and energy.

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Find out **More**

Like to know more about how you can keep your inbox empty and get e-mail under control?

- Is email is central to most of your work?
- Do you feel that email is the biggest time waster and source of frustration in your day?
- Would you like to half the amount of the time and effort you currently spend 'doing email'?



That's where connecting with me will help. I'd like to show you how to master your email and make a real difference to your workplace productivity and personal life. In fact, more and more clients tell me that what I show them is 'life changing'!

Hi, I'm Stuart Snooks. I work with busy professionals who are struggling to get control of their inbox and master their email. After 10 years as a specialist in this area, I've learnt that email overload is not so much about volume as it is about a lack of a 'process' or a system for managing this critical aspect of everyday workload.

You see, most of us have never been taught how to master the productivity tools we use with our own hands every day. And as our technology delivers ever increasing volumes at faster and faster speeds, it's so important that we learn, right now, how to keep up.

If you like, I'd be happy to have quick chat with you about this in more detail.

The **WWW** of Mastering Your E-mail



Let's connect

If you're interested, the easiest way to arrange this is for us to jump on the phone for 10-15 minutes. That way, I can get to know you, understand your biggest email challenge(s), give you some advice and discuss options to work together in the future if we are a good fit.

Simply use my on-line calendar to schedule a convenient time for us to connect and have a chat about your current situation.

 [Click to Schedule](#)

I look forward to speaking with you sometime soon!

All the best!

Stuart G. Snooks

Email Productivity Expert

 0413 830 772

 www.steuartsnooks.com.au

 stuart@solutions4success.com.au

