



Our mission is to provide information and strategies to business owners and managers for improvement in the effectiveness of its business management so that key objectives can be realized.

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Enhancing Performance Through Electronic Communications

If you played the “telephone game” when you were a child, you probably recall the hilarity when one friend repeated another friend’s story – incorrectly – until you got to the end of the line and the story was completely jumbled.

While children may be playing the telephone game in 2003, they’re more than likely online playing with instant messaging – a similar experience, but one that is much, much more sophisticated and falls into the electronic communications arena.

Worldwide, it is estimated that there are more than 605 million online users as of fall 2002, with 182 million in the United States and Canada. With these numbers continuing to grow each year, who would have predicted the revolution that took place over the last several years with respect to the way we can instantly communicate across the globe?

Performance is measured in a number of ways within today’s business environment. Certainly, specific tools like employee reviews are one way to relate performance to productivity, while tracking bottom-line revenue producers is another way. Going on the theory that communications is king and email is standard in today’s business marketplace, companies that adopt and use a standardized approach to enhancing performance through electronic communications are the ones who will excel.

Why? Although email is a tool, it often is not thought of as a productivity enhancer, but rather, a means to ask a question and receive an answer – or at the very basic, a way to communicate. Two, statistics prove that any time a business standardizes its processes, it undoubtedly becomes more efficient because the business now has a way to measure its processes and evaluate effectiveness. Just take a look at how productivity increases once a company ensures all of its computers are running on the same operating systems and same platforms.

Here are a few ways you can use electronic communications to achieve a spike in productivity.

Manage Email Messaging

It’s easy to set your browser or contact management program to receive email every 10 minutes, but is that really efficient? You can liken an email message to a ringing phone or even a knock on the door ... this is an interruption that can be annoying and frustrating at the same time.

A better idea would be to build in controls on how often you will read your email. As humans, we are programmed to respond when someone calls our name, so when you receive an email, the first task you think you want to do is answer the message. Instead, arrange your day so you only read email two or perhaps three times daily. Although this might seem preposterous at first, actually carving out that time will make you more productive to get the rest of your work done. Providing email time limitations or parameters also sends a message to your team – that they should focus on something else besides email (hopefully, making the company more money).

If you find it unrealistic to set what you might think are rigid controls, then do what’s best for you and your own productivity. In addition, you might be waiting for an all-important email with a signed contract or something else that is time sensitive. In these cases, by all means, check your email more often.

Study Your Software – Submit Comments

Although we all use standard software suites to do work, how much do you know about your word processing, contact management and other programs? Would it help to know just a bit more to become truly productive?

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Of course, something like this can't be learned overnight; you could read books, manuals, take online courses or even attend public seminars. But who has the time?

One solution is to pool your company resources by asking your staff to submit one to two time-saving comments a week, then compile those comments into a weekly email to the entire staff. Sure, you're going to get some repetitious advice, but you're also likely to get handy tips on how to handle seemingly routine tasks – all for a few minutes of each person's time.

In compiling comments, be sure to include everyone's advice, even if something might seem too basic or even too complicated. Be sure you don't want to leave anyone out that wants to contribute because you never know how many people may be struggling with the same challenges.

The person responsible for compiling these gems of wisdom also might think about using a spreadsheet approach or some other way to segment ideas into topics by function or action. For example, all word processing tasks can be housed on its own spreadsheet or file, while tasks on how to mail merge might be found in another file. Ask the staff for ideas on how to categorize comments – again, you'll get their buy-in and probably get a volunteer to raise his or her hand to do the work!

Monitor Email While Absent

Nothing's worse than being on vacation or out of the office traveling (without access to email) only to come back with hundreds of email messages – many more than anyone could possibly handle in one work day. Instead of coming back to this debacle, assign someone in your office to check your email while you're out. Although some might look at this as an invasion of privacy, think about how much more productive you will be knowing you won't come back to an email message that should be handled three days ago. Ever notice how when you take off for two weeks of vacation, you have much less work to do than if you took a long weekend with just two days of vacation? The same principle applies.

Think Productive!

These are just three ways to increase productivity through electronic communications. Think about other ways you can help the cause and begin managing communications before it manages you. Contact us for other ways we can enhance your company's performance. Our goal is to make your company better.