

Managing Your Email Mailbox

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Reprinted from *Christian Computing Magazine*

While talking with a colleague I realized that many people don't have a good email storage strategy; one that improves their productivity and avoids being an overwhelming distraction. While mine is not necessarily the best, it is a strategy that keeps my mailbox fairly lean. And it helps me be more productive and focused... maybe it'll help you too!

Inbox

I try to keep my Inbox pretty clean. My goal is to have it only contain those new emails I need to respond to but haven't yet. Once I respond to an email (and I always include the original in my response), I delete the one I received. So even though I manage between 100 and 225 emails on any given workday, my Inbox is focused. In fact, right now (mid-afternoon) it only has 8 items in it!

Sent Items

I use my Sent Items folder as a follow-up tickler file. Once I receive some kind of acknowledgment of an email that I sent, I delete the one I sent (especially since all that I said is likely contained in the response). Emails I send for which I don't need a response either get deleted or filed away (more on that in a moment). The result is that the only items in my Sent Items folder are those for which I'm still awaiting a response. And if I don't get one in a reasonable period of time (varies based on the email subject and content), I resend it and add at the top something like "Resending from 2/21...". My Sent Items folder currently has 30 items in it.

Deleted Items

Just like the kitchen trash, I empty my trash at the end of every day. This also gives me a sense of how many emails I touch in a given day, which is kind of fun to know! My count so far today is 266.

Filing Emails for Future Reference

I need to keep some emails in case I need to refer to them in the future. For those I create a folder that's on the same level as my Inbox called Cabinet (I think of it as a filing cabinet). I do this by right-clicking my name at the top of the folder structure and saying I want to create a new folder. Then I create folders under Cabinet that help me categorize those emails I want to save. I name them after clients or events, etc, to make finding things easy. Then, after receiving an acknowledgement from someone of an email I sent that I may need for future reference, I just drag it into an appropriate folder in my Cabinet!

A helpful hint, by the way, is to keep folder names short so they're easy to see.

Signatures

I have different ways I like to sign my emails based on who they're going to and their content or tone. So I have a number signatures already set up, allowing me to simply say, "add my signature"! I then choose the appropriate one:

- *Professional*. This is my official email signature. It includes my company name and title, company catchphrase, contact information, and link to our corporate website. I have one of these for each of the companies and ministries I'm involved in.
- *Personal*. This is my signature for email I send to those that are not professional relationships. It includes my name, home phone, and link to our family website.
- *Just Nick*. This simply has my name in it! I use it when I'm:
 - Responding to someone who doesn't need the information in one of my other signatures, or
 - When I'm responding to someone's email that is a response to an email I sent earlier, so one of my other signatures is already in the email. There's usually no need to continue adding that.

There you have it! Nick's tricks to managing email and keeping the mailbox database efficient! I hope you find it helpful!

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