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So who owns email anyway? Ask a professional, “How is it going with email?” and you’ll get an avalanche of complaints: “Let’s blow up the reply-to-all key!” “Why can’t people get to the *&!% point!” “Email is out of control!”

The growing cost and frustration tied to low value email is moving rapidly onto the radar screens of corporate leaders across the nation. A new Info-Excellence (www.infoexcellence.com) survey of over 20,000 professionals reveals that employees now spend 40% of their time on email and related activities. Over a third of that time is thought to be wasted. This means that an organization with 5,000 professionals wastes \$21 million a year in email processing time. Extrapolated across the nation’s 56 million professionals, this equates to an astounding \$308 billion in wasted time each year.

Remarkably, email remains a largely unmanaged corporate resource and, unfortunately, few professionals have assumed ownership of the quantity, quality, and liability of the 18,000 email messages that they send and receive each year. The **Cohesive Knowledge Solutions'** research team asked over 8,000 professionals for their thoughts on email. While 75% believed that *co-workers* over-use the reply-to-all key, less than 15% believed that they, themselves, did.

What about IT? They can help, but don't look for the IT folks to tackle the email productivity juggernaut alone. They do an excellent job of pulling together the technology infrastructure, but when it comes to teaching internal clients how to be more judicious, clear, and concise with email, they get a little nervous. Remember, these are *techies* not superstar trainers.

What about HR? Internal HR surveys indicate that email overload is a top productivity drain and a major source of work/life balance complaints. Sure, Human Resources would like to help, but many feel uncomfortable delving into tech-related challenges. HR is likely to respond with individual improvement courses like time management or email etiquette which are not effective change agents for groups or enterprises.

How about the CEO? Frustrated execs often try to take ownership of the email overload challenge. One well-publicized tactic is to simply tell the entire company not to use email on Fridays.¹ You have to give them credit for trying, but this approach is draconian and short-sighted. Suffice it to say that a lot of people lose productivity when the email *baby* is tossed out with the overload *bathwater*. More importantly, *No E-mail Fridays* has zero impact on the quality of messaging, and it sub-optimizes the communications power that email enables – when it is done right.

Just Say No to Tip Sheets! A more popular and even less successful dictum is to send out a list of top-ten email commandments. Most busy professionals simply delete them and go on with their sinful ways. The perception is that they are powerless to change because no one else is changing; to them email commandments are just another slice of spam.

¹ The Wall Street Journal, The Day the Email Dies, 26-Aug-2004, Midwest ed., p. B7

So What Do I Do About Email Overload? The answer is to change the behavior of groups of people, not just individuals. Establishing agreed upon team norms and empowering every professional to evolve toward being a proactive information manager is the best way to create meaningful email productivity gains. When enlightened teams interact with other teams, best practices spread virally throughout the organization. A training and team building program can be an effective way to get the ball rolling. Support this training with consistent email guidelines and best practices for leveraging existing technology and you have a powerful catalyst for sustainable enterprise wide productivity gains. An individual is isolated and may feel powerless, but a team is supportive and ultimately competitive.

What vendors offer these kinds of solutions? Answer: Few. To date, most training vendors have traditionally aligned themselves with either IT or HR. The IT oriented training companies provide rather dry, "How to Use Excel" style courses while the HR oriented training companies provide non-technical motivational, leadership, and communications courses.

And so, true email productivity solutions disappear into a kind of black-hole located somewhere in between the professional, IT, HR, and the CEO.

Email Productivity: Owners Wanted!

So how can you conquer a difficult challenge that no one owns?

1. Form a cross functional team of empowered leaders from each of the C-level executive domains (IT, HR, KM, Finance, Sales, etc.)
2. Entice participation by using internal employee surveys and additional productivity research. For example, what percentage of a typical professional's day is spent on email and related activities? (Usually about 40%!) What percentage of that time is considered poorly utilized or wasted? (Usually about a third!) The need is real!
3. Do the math and show the team that roughly one half day per week (10% of professional time) is being wasted. Annualize those wasted hours, convert into dollars and multiply by the number of professionals at your organization. For example, 4 wasted hours per week X 48 weeks per year X \$30/hour salary X 10,000 professionals = \$57.6 million dollars wasted each year. Ouch!

Point out that this year, just like last year, the expectation is that everyone must do *more with less resources*. (And email volume is increasing by 10-20% annually.) Also, remind them that a successful email productivity project might lighten their individual email load and get them home a little earlier at night. Everyone has their own email pet peeve. Get them to vent and you're halfway home. Look around the room, people should be buying in. With your leadership, the ownership of email has finally begun to evolve at your organization.

But what good are email owners without an email solution? Good news on that front. There is a way: Find a business solutions partner with *hybrid* expertise. Your email productivity program must deliver both IT (knowledge of software) and HR (teamwork, leadership, behavioral change and communication) skills. Your partner must understand technology and the professional psyche. Demand references and metrics. Don't be a guinea pig. Your business partner must know exactly how to attack that \$57.6 million dollars in wasted time. They must come prepared with enterprise solutions not boutique programs designed for individuals.

Wait! Before you jump to Google and start your search, I should mention that the authors of The Hamster Revolution who also developed the award-winning Info-Excellence Get More Done Seminar are available to assist with your email initiative.

Info-Excellence has helped organizations reduce email volume by 20% while improving email quality by 50%. Clients include 15% of the Global 1000. The result is improved professional productivity *and* quality of life. Another option is to bring a passionate and prepared email efficiency speaker in to speak to your people. Authors of the Hamster Revolution are ready, willing, and able to provide game-changing inspirational talks that change email behavior for good.

- So call 1-888-340-3598 or email us at info@infoexcellence.com for more information on training, consulting, and keynote speeches for your people.