

## Management Article -- Taming Your Inbox: 7 Tips to More Efficient Use of E-mail

As entrepreneurs, we are all challenged by the growing volume of daily e-mail. E-mail can be a remarkable tool that boosts productivity or it can be a huge time waster. Mostly how well email works for you depends upon how skilled you are at effectively managing it.

I would like to share some of the tips and tricks that have helped me manage the hundreds of e-mails that I get every business day.

- **Handle it once if possible:** When looking over e-mail, I have a goal of getting it handled with one touch. It saves time to respond, delete, forward, or move an e-mail to a relevant folder in one touch.
- **Leave unresolved e-mails in your inbox:** I have found that it is hard to overlook an email issue that I am working on if I am diligent in handling my incoming e-mail and leave a few pending emails in an otherwise clean inbox. Keeping your inbox clean will help you find things easier and lower your level of stress. Leaving the pending issues in your box, rather than a folder on the desktop, makes it less likely you will overlook an issue that needs resolving.
- **Set up a sensible system of folders:** Everyone is different in this regard, but for most people, the number of folders should not go beyond a dozen or two. This is E-mail 101, but I am surprised by the number of people who do not use folders properly or do not even have a system of folders at all.
- **Set aside particular times for dealing with email:** Some people feel compelled to constantly check their email or respond every time they hear the ping of an incoming e-mail. Turn off e-mail notification and reserve time twice a day to do e-mails. Constant checking is a huge drain on productivity and very few e-mails are so urgent that they cannot wait.
- **Be brief:** Try to answer e-mail in a few words. Sometimes one word will do. Developing the skill to answer quickly is the only way to stay ahead of e-mail.
- **Write good subject lines:** It is a time waster to get an e-mail from an employee with a subject line that does not clearly communicate the contents. Here are two bad subject lines: **Meeting, Issue to Resolve.** Make certain that your people know how to write good subject lines: **Meeting with Tom Jacobs Rescheduled to 2 pm, Truck Repair estimate 2k more than expected.** Be a good example in this regard by taking the extra time to evaluate subject lines in your e-mails.
- **Recognize the limits of e-mail** – E-mail is a very poor way to discuss an issue when a decision needs to be made. Most e-mail discussions wander off topic. E-mail is also a poor way to build rapport. Sometimes the best answer is to

communicate another way. Think carefully about whether a phone call or meeting might be better than an e-mail.

By applying these tips to how you manage your inbox, you can make yourself more productive and less stressed by an overflowing inbox.

Don't forget to subscribe to Ron's free monthly auto recycling e-newsletter, with news and tips, register at [www.autosalvageconsultant.com](http://www.autosalvageconsultant.com).

Remember, only you can make BUSINESS GREAT!

*Ron Sturgeon is past owner of AAA Small Car World. In 1999, he sold his six Texas locations, with 140 employees, to GreenLeaf. In 2001, he founded North Texas Insurance Auction, which he sold to Copart in 2002. In 2002, his book "Salvaging Millions" was published to help small business owners achieve significant success, and was recently reprinted. In June 2003, he joined the new ownership and management team of GreenLeaf. He also manages his real estate holdings and investments. You can learn more about him at <http://www.autosalvageconsultant.com>. He can be reached at 5940 Eden, Haltom City, TX 76117, [rons@rdsinvestments.com](mailto:rons@rdsinvestments.com) or 817-834-3625 ext 6#.*