

8 Ways To Tame The Email Monster

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Glenn Gordon
glenn.gordon@attbi.com

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E-mail, to the Internet business, is the ultimate double-edged sword. You can't get along without it but at the same time it is always threatening to overwhelm you in one way or another. And if you are also a ezine publisher that likes to keep up with all that is going on the Internet world, the problem is much worse. I don't even want to know how many ezines I am subscribed to, but it is far too many. So in sheer self-defense I have put together a battle plan that can restore some semblance of order to your inbox. The suggestions that follow are based on Outlook Express but should be translatable to a number of other email programs also.

1. Make use of the message rules - this is so obvious I wouldn't even mention it but for two reasons. One is that the following suggestions all relate in one way or another to the application of message rules. The second is that a surprising number of people don't take advantage of this powerful tool. But, just as you store paper documents in labeled folders rather than in a big pile, properly applied message rules automatically put email messages in folders for easy retrieval and action. Briefly stated, message rules allow you to designate the destination of any email message by sender, by receiver, by words in the subject line or by words in the body. You can delete the message, forward it, move or copy it to a specified folder.

In Outlook Express, access message rules by clicking on Tools, Message Rules and Mail. Click on New, then select the Conditions for the rule (what you want the rule to look for in the message), then the Actions for the rule (what you want the rule to do with the message). Once you have

selected the Condition and Action, you can then describe the specific word or address to look for, and which folder will receive the message. One thing to note: Copy means just that. It leaves the message in the inbox and makes a copy in whatever folder you specify. Unless you want to deal with an email twice, you will usually want to use Move rather than Copy.

2. Make a customized spam filter - if you, like me, learn that your ISP is filtering (and deleting) your mail according to THEIR rules, perhaps without even telling you what they were doing, you will welcome the ability to craft a spam filter according to YOUR wishes. You can quickly make a rule to delete all messages with common offensive words, then analyze any remaining objectionable messages you receive and modify the rule accordingly. A single rule can delete a message based on detecting any one of the objectionable words, so this is a powerful tool indeed. If you find that a certain sender sends nothing but junk and you can't get off his list, you can make a rule to properly dispose of all messages he sends regardless of content.

3. Sort your mail by priority - once you have established a rule or rules to send spam and junk mail to its rightful place, start prioritizing the remainder. For example, I have set up 5 folders labeled Ezines 1 through Ezines 5. I then did a rough prioritization of the quality of the ezines I receive and established 5 rules to route received ezines accordingly. This process may have the side benefit of prompting you to unsubscribe from some useless ezines or sales letters.

4. Sort your mail by content - I receive one ezine that is so valuable that I don't want to miss an issue, and also don't want to have to go hunting to find it. This prompted me to make a separate folder and rule for this ezine, so I can look at all the recent issues at a glance. I also have a folder reserved for ezines that offer free subscriber ads.

5. Sort by nature of message - you may find that it fits the way you work to set up a personal folder and establish a rule that sends all mail there sent by your friends and family. Another folder and rule can hold all your joint venture correspondence, etc. Once you understand the power at your fingertips and decide which approach fits the way you work and think, the possibilities are endless.

6. Send yourself an email - if you spend as much time on emails as I do, you may find yourself wishing you had some URL, signature file or program ID at hand instead of having to go into a text file to get it. You can quickly solve that problem by putting these common items in one or more emails and sending them to yourself. You can establish a separate

folder exclusively for these items, or move them manually to the proper folders after receipt. Of course, if you make use of your message rules, these emails can also be sent to their proper folder destinations automatically.

7. Get used to folder-based thinking - once you have the bulk of your email going to its respective folders, it is much easier to deal with the rest. Rather than going through one big message list, you can instead get used to scanning your folder list for bolded titles, indicating unread messages. You get to decide, by categories of your choosing, which messages are most important to look at. No more trying to keep track of a message by writing down the date and time it was received, or copying its contents into a text file. It's a different way of operating and may take a little time to get used to, but it can help you to get organized on several fronts.

8. Include in your backups - the more "email-centric" your system of organization becomes, the more important it becomes to maintain backups of your messages. In the case of Outlook Express, Microsoft hasn't made it easy to do backups. You may want to consider a program designed especially for that task. It isn't free, but it is low cost. You can get the details at <http://www.abfsoftware.com/>

Start attacking the email monster today!

Glenn Gordon
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