

Save Valuable Time: Automate Your Email



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Save Valuable Time – Automate Your Email

Introduction

Using this Ebook

This article is a free publication of Desert Wave Enterprises. You may circulate it anywhere, by any means, but must never alter or sell it.

It will print on A4 or Letter size paper if you prefer a hardcopy.

Aim

To provide you with sufficient information and options for you to streamline the email management activities of your business whether you are a one-person-band (like me) or a 30 person law practice.

By the time you have read this document you will know how to overcome what I call 'email bloat'. So, get yourself a refreshment of choice and read this from start to finish ... it won't take long and it will be time well invested.

Contents

The following topics are in this ebook:

Topic	See Page
The Email Problem	2
Solving the Problem	2
Identify Unwanted Email (SPAM) and Delete it Quickly	3
Handling Your Incoming Email	4
Automating Replies	8
Case Study	8
Three Types of Automation	9
Conclusion	15
Additional Resources	15

The Email Problem

Problems or Challenges?

Actually there are many problems, but let's focus on the main one – **email is time-consuming.**

How many hours per day do you spend managing and answering email?

If you kept an accurate record, you'd probably frighten yourself. Just highlighting and getting rid of spam every day takes me perhaps 10 minutes. If I spent another hour every day dealing with legitimate email and multiplied that by 365 days per year (yes, I really do check my email 365 days per year), my total annual commitment to email would be roughly 53 days. That's assuming I work an eight hour day. That's about six weeks out of your working year just to answer email.

Now, let's be honest. You couldn't automate all of your email and save yourself six weeks. However, even if you saved one week, wouldn't it be worth it? Think of how many more pages you could add to your pet writing project in a week ... or the clients you could talk with, advertisements you could write and so on.

We don't want to get bogged down with numbers, but it's healthy to reflect on the fact that you can spend a significant proportion of your work time on comparatively unproductive effort. The idea is to manage and automate your email system to get rid of as much of your unproductive effort as possible; you can then apply it to productive activities that generate money. After all, there are only 24h in your day ... and my day ... every day.

Solving the Problem

Manage It!

There are numerous ways to solve most problems. That is true of the email bloat problem.

In this ebook I discuss a few simple problem-solving strategies. Much of the content relates to *managing* your email to improve efficiency (rather than letting it manage you) and decreasing the effort (time) involved.

If you are in business, you simply can't afford not to have your email under control ... it's costing you money, eating into your profit by wasting your valuable time.

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Solving the Problem, Continued

Identify SPAM and Delete It

The first step is to identify unwanted email (SPAM) and delete it quickly.

While there are dozens of spam filters available, all carry the significant risk that they might unintentionally wipe out an email offering you a \$30,000 contract. Or perhaps a night of bliss with an old flame. So there's an element of 'Catch 22' about spam filters – you can shoot yourself in the foot while shooting spam!

Rather than give some spam filter program the power to dictate whether you receive email addressed to you, it's better to have control over the process yourself. A better solution is to download only sufficient information about your email for you to identify what you want to receive. That's what I do. I keep the junk mail out of my inboxes by deleting or bouncing it before it's even loaded into my email client.

I use a shareware program called [MailWasher](#). MailWasher downloads only the headers ie, the 'To', 'From', and 'Subject' details without all the content and attachments. It allows me to click a delete button on the junk mail, but it also has a bounce feature so I can bounce the message back to the originator who receives a reply advising that my address doesn't exist (and perhaps they'll delete my address from their mailing list).



Mailwasher Partial Screen Capture – Free Version

MailWasher also enables you to identify 'Friendly' addresses which it 'remembers' and flags green so you don't accidentally delete them. As you identify more and more spam, MailWasher remembers the spam addresses and paints them red as 'Blacklisted', making your deletion task even simpler.

You can arrange for all Blacklisted messages to appear at the bottom or top of your view screen so they are easier to work with. Similarly with other email marked 'Friend' etc.

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Solving the Problem, Continued

When I've cleaned the junk out, I leave MailWasher running in the background and open my other programs which only load the messages I have accepted into my inbox.

Mail Washer suits me because I use two programs to process incoming mail. It's easier for me to delete junk messages before they get tangled up in my directories, newsletter and customer lists etc.

You can download a free version of [MailWasher](#) here and have it installed and running in about 10 minutes.

Now that you know how to get rid of the junk mail and effectively reduce the number of incoming email messages, the next step is to automate your receipt and response to the legitimate email.

Handling Your Incoming Email

Managing Your Folders

Even a large amount of email that isn't spam can be time consuming. By putting in place some simple processes, you can reduce your workload immensely. Here's where we discuss some real time savers.

The spam-free incoming mail probably falls within discrete categories like:

- ❖ Personal mail
- ❖ Customer enquiries or subscriptions
- ❖ Customer orders
- ❖ Internal mail
- ❖ Correspondence from suppliers or third-parties

What we are going to do is arrange to move incoming email to one or other of these folders using features found in almost every email software program.

Most email clients such as MS Outlook Express or 200X have a Rules Wizard feature allowing you to set up rules for processing email. You can use this to make life easier and more efficient.

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Handling Your Incoming Email, Continued

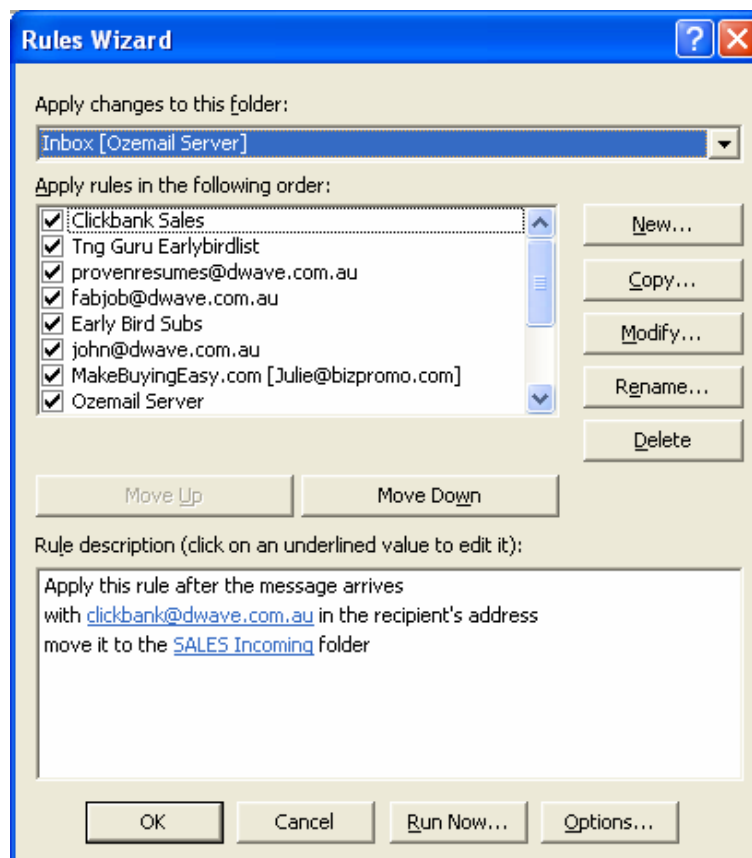
First, create folders/directories for different categories you use and place these folders under your Inbox folder so they look something like this:

- Inbox
 - Client queries
 - Help
 - Miscellaneous
 - Orders
 - Personal
 - Subscriptions

... anything else you choose.

Now, create a Rule using the Rules Wizard to move client queries into the Client queries folder, requests for help into the Help folder and so on. If you get into the Help section of whatever email program you use, you'll be able to find out how it's done. It's very logical once you've seen how it works, so don't be frightened off.

Here's a screen capture of my Outlook Rules Wizard entry screen:



Note the Rule Description which displays the options I have chosen for the Wizard that handles Clickbank Sales notifications.

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Handling Your Incoming Email, Continued

NB: The email addresses in this text are not genuine email addresses although they may open a new email screen when clicked.

There's various ways the Rules Wizard can identify how an email should be handled. Take a look at this simple example. Say I wanted to create a link for clients seeking help from my ebooks download, page. I'd place a form or link on the page which emails client requests for help to help@mydomain.com.

I'd set up the Rules Wizard so that when an email arrives with help@mydomain.com in the To field, the message is moved to the folder called Help. In Outlook, when a new message arrives, a number appears at the end of the folder like this 'Help (5)'.

An alternative way to format the email address also provides a Subject field entry eg, you could have people automatically email help@mydomain.com?Subject=Help_Download

(Click on this now and see what happens ... it should pop up a new email message To help@mydomain.com with the Subject line 'Help_Download').

With the added information in the Subject line, we now have more we can do with the Rules Wizard. We could set up the Rules Wizard to check our incoming email for messages with the Subject line Help_Download and carry out specific actions.

Rules Wizard is a very powerful function that can help you get organized and save plenty of time.

If you own your domain eg, <http://www.robinhenryinc.com>, you may be able to use any word or letters as the prefix to your email if your ISP provides what is known as a catch-all address. A catch-all address, as the name suggests, catches anything coming into your domain and redirects it to another address.

Because of this, you can use a combination of different prefixes AND different subject lines to handle your email and have them all end up in your inbox in different folders. Here are some examples for the domain <http://www.robinhenryinc.com>:

help.email@robinhenryinc.com
help.services@robinhenryinc.com
subscribe.newsletter@robinhenryinc.com
personal@robinhenryinc.com

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Handling Your Incoming Email, Continued

By using these different prefixes with Rules I can get different results. By using different subject lines I can create another range of results. More examples using subject lines:

help.email@robinhenryinc.com?Subject=Group_Mail_Help

help.email@robinhenryinc.com?Subject=Outlook_Help

help@email@robinhenryinc.com?Subject=Mailloop_Help

All of these emails will be directed via the catch-all feature to a nominated email address, say mymail@robinhenryinc.com .

But because each is different, it can be handled differently by rules set up using Rules Wizard.

If you decide to go down this path you need to design a convention and document it so you use it consistently, otherwise you'll get confused. For example, if you have three newsletters, you could use the following email addresses to subscribe:

sub.goodeatingnewsletter@robinhenryinc.com

sub.betterhealthguide@robinhenryinc.com

sub.savingmoney@robinhenryinc.com

The unsubscribe request email might be:

unsub.goodeatingnewsletter@robinhenryinc.com

... and so on.

Now you know how to handle incoming email messages, you need to consider ways to automate replies saving your time replying to each individual.

Unfortunately, this process isn't as useful as it might be in Outlook 2002 as you'll see shortly.

Automating Replies

One of the options in Rules Wizard is to 'Reply using a specific template' (Outlook). So, when a message arrives you can automatically reply to it using a template email and there are many benefits.

Say you receive a request for help regarding a product you sell. Your incoming email is moved into the help folder and an automatic reply sent that lists the 25 most common questions and answers. At the bottom of your email you state something like, 'If none of the information in this message solves your problem, please email more.help45@robinhenryinc.com giving full details of the problems you are experiencing. We'll give you a reply within two working days.'

If the first message, which is returned almost immediately (great customer service!), resolves the problem, then you have no further commitment. If not, the client can email the **more.help** address and you or someone else will have to deal with it within the promised period.

Just this type of automation can save you a lot of time if set up properly.

Unfortunately, Outlook only responds once to each individual enquirer within the same email session. This is a severe limitation. It's one reason why small businesses should have a more effective email management system and strategy.

Case Study



In my recruitment role I used the automatic response feature of Outlook to send job documentation to people seeking employment. There were often several jobs going at the same time. When enquirers emailed me for the first job they would receive the response with attachments within minutes whether I was in or out of my office.

That was the standard of service I wanted to provide; that I expected from others, but which was often not delivered.

Unfortunately, if the enquirers were also interested in the other jobs and emailed me, I'd have to answer any subsequent emails manually because the Outlook system wouldn't respond to the same enquirer more than once in the one session.

That meant I had to check each incoming email and make sure a response had been sent ... a bloody nuisance when I was trying to provide exemplary service. If the autoresponse hadn't worked, I had to open a template, enter address details and click Send, all of which took time.

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Automating Replies, Continued

When I contacted Microsoft about this matter, I was told that the module allowing autoresponses is the same one used for 'Out of Office' notifications and had the one-reply-per-client function inbuilt.

That wasn't much help to me, but at least it made sense.

Three Types of Automation

Depending on your business needs, there are three types of automation you might find useful:

- ❖ An automated response that sends ONE message to each incoming message of a particular type eg, a prospective customer requests a copy of your catalogue
- ❖ An automated response sending a SPECIFIED NUMBER of messages to each sender at a SPECIFIED DURATION eg, a request for information about a product, or a short course (See my letter writing course [here](#).)
- ❖ Automated subscription/unsubscription to an e-newsletter or other service eg, an early warning service, which also sends an automated response advising that the subscription/unsubscription has been effected

Organising these automated services is pretty straightforward either using in-house software that works from your server, or buying the service from an Applications Service Provider (ASP) and storing your information on the provider's server.

I've used both approaches. Whether you prefer one or the other methods depends on the degree of control you want, how much you wish to spend and so on.

Hiring an ASP: If getting someone else to provide all the technology for a low monthly fee appeals, [Get Response](#) or [AWeber](#) are excellent options because you can have unlimited numbers of autoresponders and as many automatic follow-ups at whatever durations you like. So, you can run your e-newsletter, e-courses, marketing campaign and more.

It's really easy to set up. You log on to your account at Get Response or AWebber and set up all the parameters you want to run your marketing program.

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Automating Replies, Continued

For example, say you were advertising tractor tyres and wanted people to contact you for information about the range, sizes, tread patterns, brands, and cost of the tyres you sell. You would first identify a keyword to use for the campaign, which might be 'adfour'. Your email address to trigger your Get Response autoresponder is adfour@getresponse.com.

When someone emails that address, one or more email responses can be automatically sent to them. The first might thank them for contacting you and include a catalogue of tyres.

A day later you might send an article about tyre pressures and why they are important. The next day you send a message about how to get long use and economy from tyres etc, etc.

All the time you are keeping in touch with them about a topic in which they are interested. They don't have to be lengthy articles, just tips about tyres.

Can you see the benefit of this approach? You don't just hand out a catalogue and never see them again (which often happens in your shop). By repeat exposure to your firm and helpful information, they get to know you and trust you as being an expert on tyres. They may even feel some obligation to buy from you because you have helped them over and above your competition. **Bingo ... before you know it, you have a sale.**

You can also sell other things like your corporate T shirts, baseball caps, or subscriptions to magazines for which you get a commission. This 'leveraging' activity can add handsomely to your bottom line for very little cost and can be subtly included in your email as a link to your sales area.

It's a winning formula. It only needs a little creativity to identify what is likely to appeal to your target market. What else have you got that can make sales 24 hours per day, seven days per week so cost effectively?

If you aren't good at writing articles and need help setting up an autoresponder with a stream of promotional content, there are people who can help.

Get Response and AWebber make the task simple because they provide sign-up forms already coded to copy to your site. Simply cut and paste and you're in business. This saves you having to get someone to write the script for your form and then placing it in the appropriate cgi-bin folder on your server or your Internet Service Provider's server. (Last time I did that it cost \$75).

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Automating Replies, Continued

Out-tasking this activity to a specialist ASP for a monthly fee is a highly suitable approach if you are sure you have sufficient activity to get a return on your investment ie, by using the system as often and as much as you can. I used the [GetResponse](#) paid service for a year or two, but didn't have sufficient need to justify continuing the monthly outlay. I've just recently started up again with [AWeber](#).

Now I have unlimited autoresponders included with my websites and can easily build as many subscription boxes as I need.

By the way, once you have a list of subscribers to your lists, you can send what is known as a Broadcast message; a special mailout to every subscriber any time you like.

Say you have a special discount that only lasts for one week. The day before, you log into your autoresponder account and send a message about your discount to everyone on your list. Think of the additional exposure you get from that.

An additional benefit is that when you advertised your tyres, you asked people to get more information by emailing adfour@getresponse.com. This means that when you check your statistics at your Getresponse account management module, you'll know how effective – or ineffective your advert was.

Summary: If you use Getresponse or another ASP, everything is managed off-site by a firm that does it professionally ... they know what they are about and they do it exceptionally well. ASPs can do the three types of activities you might want:

- ❖ Send a single response to enquirers; perhaps your catalogue
- ❖ Send multiple, delayed-interval responses to enquirers such as promotional/marketing data or email courses (no limit to how many follow-ups, it could go on for years)
- ❖ Accept subscriptions to your newsletter or other mailing lists, acknowledge the subscription and send (broadcast) editions of your newsletter etc when you choose.

That's what autoresponding is all about ... saving time, increasing efficiency and providing outstanding customer service.

Visit the [GetResponse](#) and [AWeber](#) sites and fully inform yourself about their services ... I know you'll be as impressed as me.

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Automating Replies, Continued

Using an In-house Approach – Group Mail: If you prefer the do-it-yourself approach to automation, you can operate from your desktop computer or high capacity server.

A very popular, efficient program for managing subscriptions and bulk mailouts is [Group Mail Personal Edition](#). I use it to manage my e-newsletter ([HRD Alert!](#) sent to about 3,000 people in HTML) and send out occasional marketing material to several other lists of clients.



Group Mail Pro Splash Screen

Group Mail allows you to process subscriptions/unsubscriptions automatically, to send an automated response to incoming subscribers/unsubscribers, and to personalize (place a person's name or other personal information in the message) if that's what you want.

NOTE: Personalising email is considered an excellent marketing strategy because people not only like to see their name in print, but they like to think that you are addressing them personally.

Group Mail is a high capacity program intended to store customer contact lists and send email. It doesn't receive email and will not allow you to automatically send replies except when someone subscribes. If it was able to receive email and send autoresponses, I'd scrap Outlook and use Group Mail for everything ... it's that good.

It's a surprisingly inexpensive program, is very efficient and reliable and well supported. It also has a very user friendly manual in PDF format.

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Automating Replies,

There is a free, trial version you can [download](#) with no time limit ... use it forever if you wish. But, it has some limitations; once you've used it you'll upgrade to Group Mail Pro or Professional.

Summary: Group Mail is excellent for outgoing email communication of any kind including newsletters. It will allow automatic subscriptions (but you have to manually run the subscription module within the program, which can be a disadvantage).

You can send standard email text messages or HTML formatted messages using several different distribution paths, personalize messages and have as many separate lists as you wish.

Group Mail even comes with a free HTML plug-in if you don't have an HTML editor and wish to send email in HTML.

In-house List Management and Marketing - Mailloop: For total list management and automated responses (but not timed sequential responses), you can't go past [Mailloop](#) which is a product of the Internet Marketing Centre.



Mailloop 5 Splash Screen

Designed by late Internet Marketing Guru Cory Rudl for his own marketing campaigns, Mailloop has an extensive range of list management and automatic response capabilities including the capacity to handle incoming forms.

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Automating Replies,

For example, if someone completes a form and sends the script to you, you can extract whatever information you want from the form and retain it in the Mailloop database. (Neither Getresponse nor Group Mail has this valuable feature).

Once you've extracted the information you can send automatic messages to different recipients based on the different contents of their forms.

Let's say you sell [e-books](#) (like me), you can receive an advice from your credit card processing merchant and then email the buyer with a specific message and attach the e-book they have ordered. All automatically.

Not only that, you can export the data you capture to MS Excel or other programs and analyse such things as which e-book is making most sales, what part of the country sales are coming from, what day of the week makes most sales etc. All good, useful stuff for people like you and me who are Internet marketing.

Mailloop is a software product that is downloaded to your desktop or server and is extremely flexible in managing lists and incoming email. It's well suited to use for incoming help messages and subscriptions to any list you may have, such as a newsletter list. It also allows you to send messages to your lists whenever you wish.

I use Mailloop to handle much of my incoming email, especially forms and help type messages.

Learn more about Mailloop 6, the latest version, at the [Internet Marketing Centre](#).

Summary: Mailloop automatically responds to messages once, so it isn't useful as a sequential, timed-interval autoresponder. However, it has powerful form and list management capabilities far superior to other programs, being capable of capturing multiple data in the database.

Once you've got your database loaded with names and email addresses, you can quickly manage that data and send as many email messages you like through the Outgoing Message module.

Conclusion

Message from
Robin Henry

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to discuss these important topics with you. I hope I've helped you gain a clearer understanding of some of the ways in which you can manage your email to prevent bloat and wasted time.

At the end of the day, time is money. As Shakespeare wrote,

'Time goes', you say, 'Oh no, alas! Time stays, we go'.

'Dos't thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life's made of'.

Time is finite. We need to make the most of it and automating helps us do that.

Additional Resources

Download a Free Link Popularity Program

Read Robin's article "**If You're Not Linking You're Losing Money**" It's all about using link management to generate traffic to your site and increase sales. Read about it here and **download the free Link Popularity program** which will tell you how many other sites are linking with yours. <http://www.dwave.com.au/link-management.html>

Manage Your Own Internet Site – Why Use a Middle Man?

With [XsitePro](#) you can develop a simple website in three or four hours that has it all. [XsitePro](#) Total Site Management software is the most innovative and useful site management software available today. It simply does it all at the click of a button or two. **Read Robin's review of XsitePro** click [here](#):

You can also visit our sites here:

<http://www.dwave.com.au>

<http://www.winagovtjob.com>

<http://www.paypal-australia.com>

Whatever you do, I wish you every success.
