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Don't let e-mail overtake your business

Special to the News Xpress

Smart business owners everywhere are brainstorming ways to cut back, save money and increase productivity. However, many businesses could simply save a significant amount of money each year by making small changes to reduce the effects of information overload, especially the overuse of e-mail.

According to Basex, an economic research and advisory firm, information overload costs U.S. businesses \$650 billion a year in lost productivity. Employees are receiving irrelevant e-mails, instant messages and phone calls. No longer are business resources wasted by the average employee playing solitaire or Tetris; instead, a massive number of e-mails are costing employers. Much of the incoming information a worker receives in an average day is unclear, incomplete or confusing.

For many, e-mail has gone from being an exciting and interesting communication tool to a dreaded part of the day. It is estimated that 247 billion e-mails will circle the globe

in 2009, and that number is expected to increase to 507 billion e-mails by 2013, according to the Radicati Group, a computer and telecommunication research company. Of these, 65% are returned to the sender for clarification due to confusing or incomplete content.

Stephanie Rosskopf, marketing manager for Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet provider, gives a couple pointers for e-mail communication.

"E-mails should be brief and to the point. It is easy for important information to be lost if the e-mail is too long," said Rosskopf. "Stick to one point if possible and bold important phrases to make it easier for the reader to skim through the message."

To effectively use e-mail, first consider the message. Ask if it is necessary to send the e-mail at all. Pay close attention to the content and the facts and consider whether the conversation should take place electronically. If the message is emotional or complex, consider communicating via





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phone or face-to-face. There is a higher chance for miscommunication when sending important messages via e-mail.

Tim Miles, a communications consultant, believes e-mail should not be a substitute for other ways of communication.

“E-mail has certainly changed the way we work for the better, but even at its best, it’s merely meant to complement personal and phone conversations.”

The second key to writing effective e-mails is to consider the mailing list and take a close look at the recipients. According to Tim Burrell, an e-mail etiquette specialist, 65-70% of e-mails are unnecessary. More than two out of three e-mails are not important or relevant to the recipients, and the “reply all” button is often the biggest contributor to this problem, creating confusion and wasting more time for others who do not need to read the response.

Finally, be sure the e-mail is proactive. End the e-mail with a call to action or a deadline. “Please get back with me by

5 p.m. on Thursday” is a good example of a closing sentence.

Or if you are sending an e-mail to multiple recipients, assign tasks to each to clarify who has responsibility for different aspects of the project. This will prevent the waste of valuable time in the attempt to understand vague messages.

While e-mail can waste significant resources if overused, businesses that are proactive in applying smart e-mail practices to cut back on wasted time will experience better communication and efficiency between employees, vendors and customers, which can positively impact the bottom line.

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