
How to master the 5/55 email strategy

If you can master email rather than letting it master you, you'll have more time to grow your business.

Email can be great for serving customers and listening to their needs. However, it can also drain time and energy and distract business owners and entrepreneurs.

Email is generally the source of most customer queries. How can you stay on top of things without email distracting you from the other work that needs to get done?

Reactive mode

Mobile phones allow us to respond to any message anytime, anywhere. But increasingly our mobile phone notifications are driving our agenda for the day. How many days have you set out a plan, then worked non-stop all day only to finish with none of your intended tasks done?

Constant notifications from email and other social media apps cause constant distractions from the work we plan to do.

Deep thinking

Tasks like writing quotes or proposals require a deep level of concentration. To get this level of focus, we need to work uninterrupted.

The statistics on our ability to focus are alarming. If we are distracted by a notification, it can take up to 23 minutes to get back to the same level of focus (Ref1). And this occurs even if we only switch away for 30 seconds.

Business owners are great multitaskers and get lots of things done. But this research shows that the quality of decision-making and creativity is really diminished. It can be viewed as skimming rather than genuinely working.

Try something new

Email is generally the biggest distracter so let's look at a strategy to take control.

There is no point in telling business owners to work with their notifications switched off. How about a strategy that allows you to stay in touch throughout the day while gaining uninterrupted time every hour for deep-thinking productive work?

The 5/55 email strategy

Here's what you need to do:

1. Change your mindset so that you view email responses in two ways: 1) checking email and 2) processing email.
 - * Checking means a quick scan, so you know what's arrived, and you know what requires an urgent response
 - * Processing means planned time in your diary for longer email replies
2. Switch off your email notifications.
3. During the day check your email for five minutes every hour and respond to urgent requests.
4. Use the remaining 55 minutes in each hour for your planned deep thinking work.
5. Schedule an hour twice a day for email processing.

That's at least eight checks per day. And think of what you can achieve in the 55 uninterrupted minutes each hour? Pitches, proposals, coaching meetings, strategy development, business planning and sales. All the things that you can never find time to do.

A guideline

This is a guideline to get you thinking. Figure out what checking frequency you require to stay in touch with your clients. Or identify days in the week when this will work best.

Get organised first

It helps to do a bit of email housekeeping first. Take an hour someday when your focus is low and use the time productively for these tasks:

- Delete old emails or archive them into monthly folders or something like "2018 to date."
- Create any folders you want for future reference emails.
- Create auto rules for managing your low priority emails.
- Create some "holding" emails to use for quick replies to clients during your five-minute check.

Top tips

In summary, you can gain back time in your day by changing your mindset regarding your email management. Here is a checklist of tips to get you started:

1. Separate email checking from email processing
2. Schedule time for email processing
3. Switch off email notifications
4. Check email every hour, or more frequently if required
5. Use holding emails to respond to clients quickly
6. Plan ahead, so you maximise your uninterrupted

This guide was written by Moira Dunne, productivity consultant and the founder of beproductive.ie.

[The cost of interrupted work: More speed and stress](#)