E-mail Notifications Can Cause Divorce

Thu, 08/26/2010 - 10:42 — Chris



[1]

Enough!

I've had enough, I'm divorcing my e-mail notifications. You get them from your computer, you get them on your phone, everytime I start my browser (and if you have your homepage set to one of those 'I can solve all of your problems just join my website' services), there it is, the notification staring at me, expecting me to do something about it.

I looked up the word "Nag" and found exactly the way I'm feeling about e-mail these days.

Demands My Attention

It doesn't matter what I'm doing, it's like the phone ringing, it just reaches out and grabs your attention. That little beep (or whatever sound you've thought was cool) goes off and I'm like Pavlov's dogs, I just have to respond. If I'm in a conversation, it takes shear willpower not to look at my computer or view my phone. That's not respectful to the person I'm talking with and it's certainly doesn't help maintaining focus on the task at hand.

Causes Anxiety - Feeling guilty for Not Responding

What if I don't respond? Will I upset that customer? What if it's the Vice President, will I look like I don't care or lose credibility if I don't respond in less than 10 minutes? I can't go on like this - it's killing me. I'm always tired, I'm not 'fired' up about what I'm doing. It takes way too much energy to go to work. I feel like I'm always behind.

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Finds Fault and Complains

More often than not, the e-mails I receive are telling me what I'm not doing. Have you looked at that proposal? When will you get back to me? Did you schedule that meeting? When will we review the plan? Don't you want to enhance your SEO (Search Engine Optimization)? Did you get my e-mail? - - - Am I not doing anything right?

Persistently Annoys

Without fail, I will be in the middle of something and *ding* the device will go off and scream "look at me". When I'm in the middle of doing something that has gotten me jazzed, I get noticeably irritated by the distraction. Sometimes, I want to throw my phone at the wall and say leave me alone.

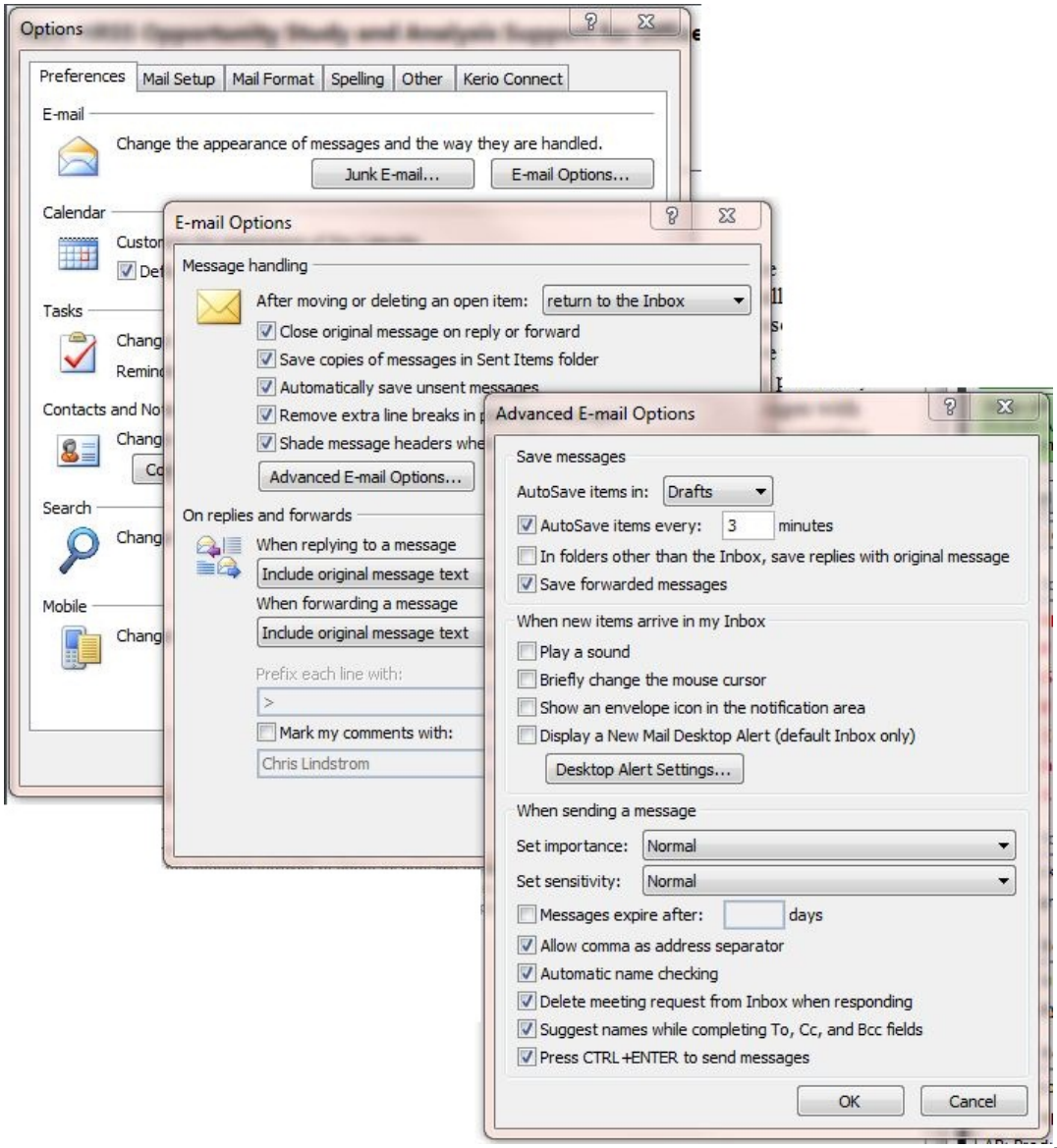
What to do Differently!

Remove the Attention Grabber

Turn off your notifications. I use Microsoft's tools, such as Outlook on my desktop and Windows Mobile on my phone. But I suspect the MAC, BlackBerry, iPhone and DROID users out there have similar mechanisms at their disposal.

In Microsoft Outlook, do this:

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[2]

Go to Tools - Options, click on the E-mail Options button on the Preferences tab. Click on the Advanced E-mail Options button and uncheck under 'When new items arrive in my Inbox', 'Play a Sound', 'Briefly change the mouse cursor', 'Show an envelope icon in the notification area', and 'Display a New Mail Desktop Alert'. ***Shut them all off, you'll feel a wave of relief just doing this, I promise.***

On a Windows Mobile phone, do this:

Press the Start button, press the Settings button, select Sounds & Notifications. Select the Notifications tab, under "Event:", find "Messaging - New e-mail message", uncheck the 'Play Sound' checkbox. Press OK.

A solid 60% to 70% of the e-mails I receive do not require a response at all, and another 20% to 30% do not require an immediate response. Unless you're a customer support technician or working in a high demand operations role, I would bet these statistics are close to what you're experiencing.

Do yourself a favor, stop reacting to 90% of your e-mails like you react to something truly urgent. Block time in your schedule to [process] [3] e-mail, and set up automatic e-mail processing rules to notify you in the case of an event or message that you really do need to respond to quickly.

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Reduce your Anxiety

Get focused on what matter's most to you. Feeling anxious is generally caused by feeling like you haven't done something or you aren't living up to someone's expectations.

I feel the best way to reduce anxiety is to master yourself. Decide who you are, find what matters most to you, and embrace a trusted management system that will help you deal with the everyday details [1] [4]. It is very easy to say, somewhat clear to understand, and incredibly difficult to do.

By understanding who you are and what matters most, you can make daily decisions regarding requests and expectations. You can be at peace with those decisions because they align with your motivation, your passion and your goals. The next time someone seems to be doubting your resolve or your deliveries, as long as you're aligned with your values, goals and plans - it doesn't really matter what that person thinks. - - - That is really powerful place to be!

By having a trusted management system, you can clear your conscious, manage everyday requests and information, and maintain focus on your goals and projects. With practice and discipline, you can effectively remove (certainly reduce) the feeling of missing something.

E-Mail Notifications No More

E-mail is a powerful servant, it provides one of the best and quickest mechanisms for communicating with people. However, it is a dreadful master - remove the beckoning of the master, use e-mail for it's purpose and on your own terms, and I guarantee your job/life satisfaction factor will improve!

Full Disclosure

I have been happily married to the same woman for 22 years. She is my first and only wife and I do not have any first-hand experience with divorce. However, I do have a number of friends that have been through it and have drawn on their experiences in fashioning this prose.

- Quality Excellence [5]

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