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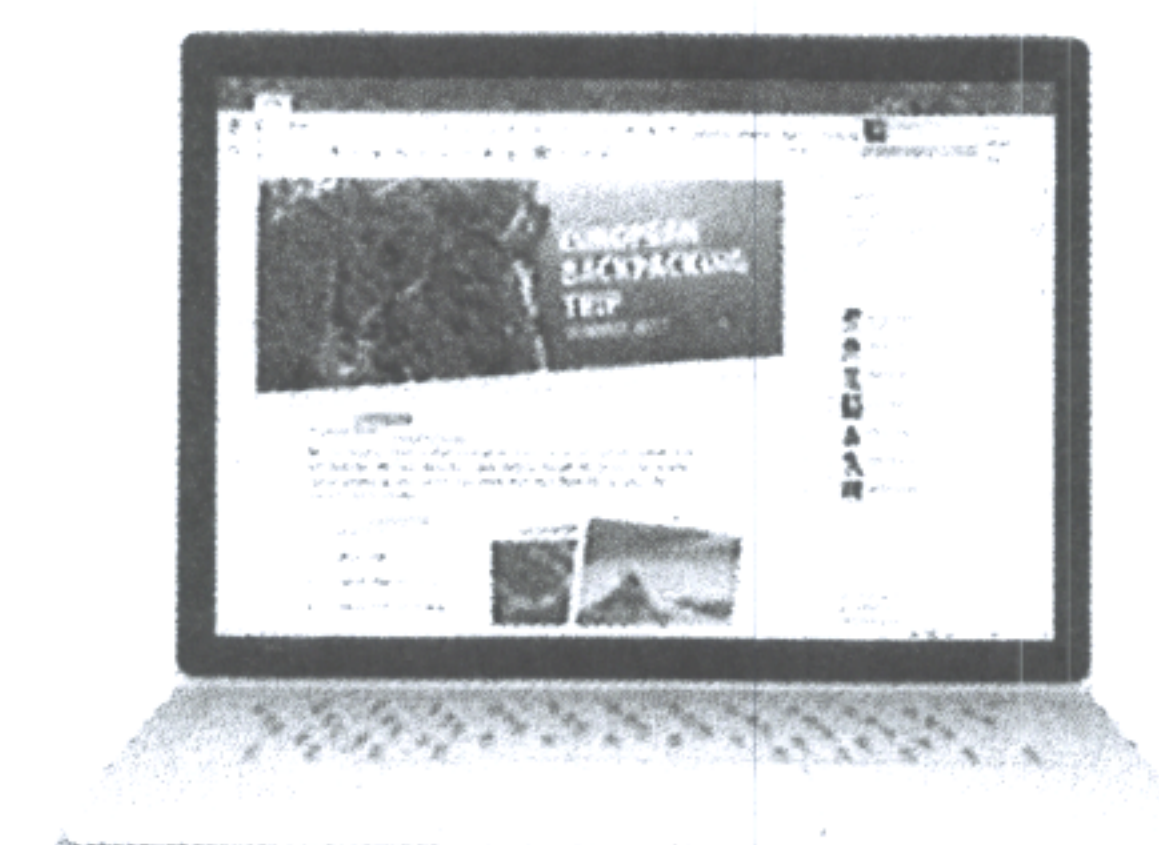
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4 ways to maximize your business communications



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By Dianna Booher, Microsoft Guest Author

I knew we'd reached a tipping point on [business communication](#) when I heard my 87-year-old mom lean back from the dinner table and say with a heavy sigh: "I'm sorry I can't stay longer. I need to go home and do email."

Business communication has become the chore most people love to hate. Yet few businesses could operate without it. The answer is

to make your business communication both efficient and effective —not drudgery and certainly not a negative for colleagues and customers. Here are four ways to maximize your business communication while minimizing the required time and effort.

Update Automated Responses That Contain Outdated Information

After hiring a firm to protest my property taxes recently, an automated response thanked me, and offered a phone number to call for questions. After having difficulty logging onto the website to upload documents, I phoned the number provided. The automated greeting on the called number looped me back to the firm's website.

A couple days later, the same scenario with a large bank. An automated response provided a contact number for "further information." That contact office explained that they were no longer responsible for handling questions and routed me to another department. It took five transfers to get to the appropriate department.

This dog-chasing-its-tail tale is not uncommon. When it happens to your customers, not all will be persistent enough to stick around, waiting for a happy ending. Stop frustrating your customers with wrong, outdated information that wastes their time. Send them directly to the right place the first time.

Use a Calendaring Tool and Project Management Tools

Many people could eliminate volumes of their weekly emails by simply using the appropriate tools to schedule meetings and manage projects. In the early days before these newer tools were developed, email systems handled this back-and-forth activity. But today, productive people can't afford to clog their correspondence system with all these unrelated tasks.

Unclutter your inbox so you can actually correspond with customers. And get the right tools to collaborate with coworkers on projects.

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Select the Best Communication Tool to “Negotiate” Details

Occasionally, your negotiation strategy itself is to “put it in writing.” That is, you plan to be the party that drafts the plan or terms, thereby sending a subtle message that you plan to control the project or that you’ll not back off your terms.

But when that’s not your intent and when you anticipate some give-and-take in a discussion before you come to decision, then don’t let email become your default method of communication. If you do, you’ll experience a deluge of 6, 7, 8 emails on a single topic and force those involved to reread long strings repeatedly to refresh themselves regarding past details.

It’s far more practical to select the correct business communication tool for that give-and-take exchange: video or audio conferencing or [Microsoft Teams](#).

Don’t Use Your Email System as a Storage File for To-Do’s

In one of my communication programs, an administrative assistant confessed her boss’s bad habit: “At any one time, he has at least a thousand unanswered emails in his inbox. It’s hopeless for anybody to try to get a message to him.” Such a situation shows someone overwhelmed by their job.

To communicate efficiently with your team, empty your email box daily: Set up rules and folders so that emails from VIPs in your life automatically go into certain folders for you to see ASAP. Send ezines and such items to read at your leisure into a separate folder. Unsubscribe from items you no longer need.

Then you can easily read and reply to your daily email. If you need to gather information or do some work before replying, schedule

your follow-up, and file the email and move it out of your inbox.

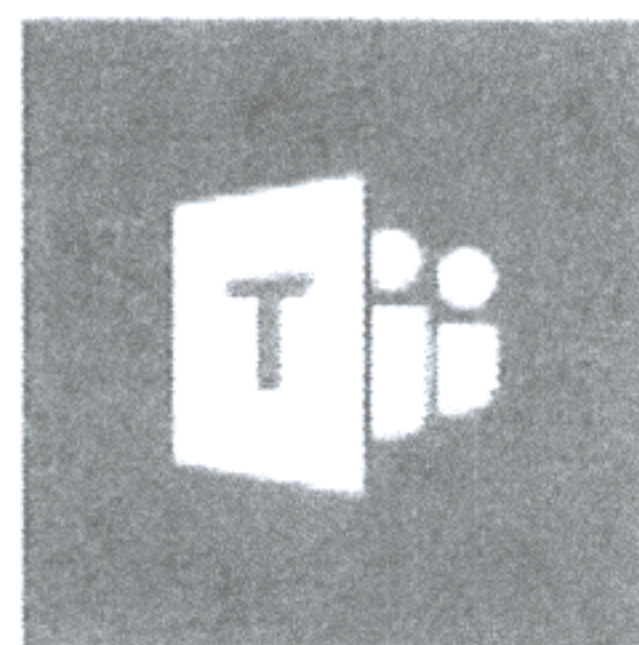
You'll be amazed how much seeing an empty inbox will relieve your stress, increase your responsiveness, and actually give you time to write clear emails!

Updated automated messages that actually address customers' issues, productive scheduling and collaborative tools, and response email messages will dramatically improve your overall business communication!

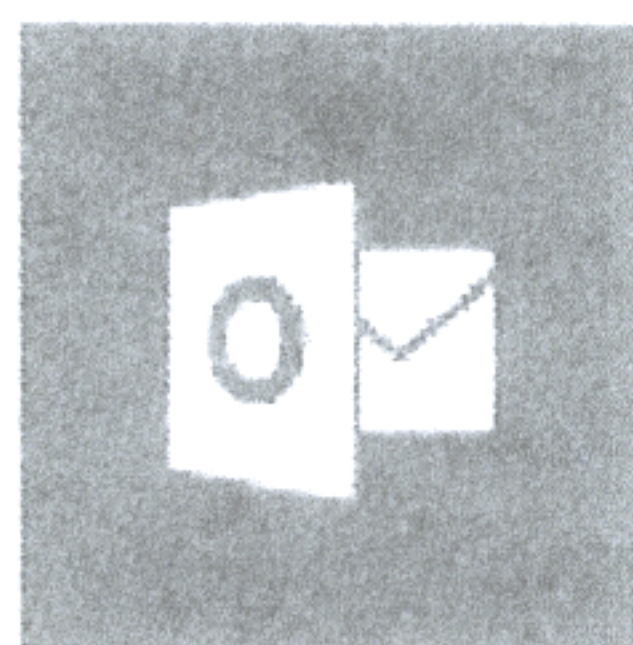
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Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 47 books, published in 60 foreign-language editions. She helps organizations to communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. She blogs regularly for Forbes, HuffPost, and The CEO Magazine. www.BooherResearch.com
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