A Better Outlook for the New Year

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce

Your inbox is a complete disaster. If that statement is untrue, stop reading. The other 99 percent of you should both stay with me and go to [webpage in ACC domain] to download my step-by-step guide to getting a handle on email. The download has the specifics. Below I'll paint some broad strokes.

Once you have implemented my system, you will look at a lot less email. What you do look at, you will get through in appreciably less time than you currently spend. But one important caveat: You will need to invest time to start saving time. My system works, but it is not magic. It is akin to (but much cheaper than) home exercise equipment — great in theory but useful only when actually used. Further, my system is not perfect. But for most of you, it will be an improvement. Finally, I'm assuming you use Outlook because it has near ubiquity. You can do all this stuff in other email clients, but you'll have to use our friend Google to figure out how.

The two keys to the system are the Reduce folder and the custom keypad. In general, I recommend two folders: Read and Reduce. You will rapidly sort your inbox to these folders by using Quick Steps and a custom keypad. Quick Steps are customizable actions. For example, you will create a Quick Step that marks an email as read and sends it to the Read folder. You'll assign hot keys (e.g., CTRL+SHIFT+T) to each Quick Step. But because of the custom keypad, there is no need to memorize these hot keys.

For the custom keypad, you can order a small, separate gaming keyboard that plugs into your computer via USB, or you can use a virtual one on phone or tablet via apps like Actions. Either way, you will end up skimming your email rapidly and sending each to a folder with the tap of a single, dedicated button.

The Read folder will contain most of your emails (unless you file your emails in separate folders, in which case Read becomes your To File folder). Emails that require follow up will be flagged (via a Quick Step). With flags, you can subsequently assign due dates to email and be able to use your inbox as a prioritized to-do list. Further, using the Favorites tab, you will be able to create a search folder that shows you only your flagged emails (just as you probably already have one for only your unread email).

The Reduce folder is for repeat email. These emails should be looked at periodically (a lot initially, less often as time passes) and result in a junk designation, unsubscription or a new Rule. Tag garbage as Junk so you never have to see its kind again. If it's not quite junk but you have no interest in subsequent emails, then unsubscribe. If you will look at it eventually, create a Rule.

Rules are preset protocols for how the program should treat emails that meet certain parameters. If you get a weekly report email that always has the same subject line, you will create a Rule based on that subject line. The Rule might be to move all emails with that subject line to your Read folder while keeping it marked as unread. Or the Rule might be to always move the reports to a specified folder because while you don't always look at them, it is important for you to know precisely where to find them when necessary. Not only will Rules work on new email, but you can run them against your existing inbox to get it under control.

Rules, unsubscription and junk will substantially reduce the number of emails that make it to your inbox. And you will be able to quickly triage the emails that do make to your inbox by pressing one of a few dedicated buttons. I strongly recommend you download the guide if you are interested in having a better Outlook in this New Year.

[D. Casey Flaherty](#)

Corporate Counsel