



**Islander November 2012
Technology Update**

Does the Overuse of Technology Outweigh its Benefits?

The senior management team at e3 is currently in the middle of a month long management training course, which has been quite fascinating. Of course, we should have done this years ago, but we carried on, assuming all the time that we know best without realising how refreshing an objective view of management techniques can be. It has been most valuable, as it has made us re-evaluate almost everything we do, and look at everything in a new light.

In a similar vein, we could all do with reviewing our use of technology occasionally, as you may discover that in several cases the overuse of certain types of technology is surpassing their benefits. One example which springs to mind is the sending of internal emails in any entity, whether this is a company or a vessel.

Firstly, try to consider that email is NOT a very good communication tool, but it IS an excellent delivery tool. If you can do this, you may find you can get over your addiction, and your day will be more productive, enjoyable and less stressful.

I have recently read a number of reports on companies that have tried a week's "internal email detox" and albeit they were initially greeted with much scepticism, they later realised that there were many benefits.

Obsessive use of email

We have become obsessed with the use of email. Many people find that their entire day's work is controlled by their email. Thus typical reactions to banning the use of email for internal communications range from, "We won't get anything done" through to "The whole company is going to grind to a halt" to "It'll be chaos!"

However, recent studies undertaken show that internal emails account for on average of 75% of all emails in most organisations. We waste hours of every day slogging through a hundred useless e-mails just to ensure that we don't look irresponsible by missing the two or three important ones. Email is not the best medium for addressing the issues and opportunities on hand. They enable quick questions to be asked, which often don't have quick answers and in many cases are unnecessary.

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To cap that, emails enable lazy and thoughtless communication. We use emails to pass the buck to a colleague, feeling a sense of relief when we press the “Send” button – in effect we’re just saying “it’s your problem now”. However, the relief is short-lived when a similar email appears in our own inbox!

Most of us look at our inbox each day, and cherry-pick the easy emails to handle first. We reply to those quickly, and get a completely unjustified sense of achievement, even though the subject matter may have been very unimportant and of low priority. The trickier and more important emails, which require our serious consideration, languish in our inbox waiting for action. The obsessive, rapid-fire control that email has over us often stops us from asking ourselves, “Is the content of this email a real priority that needs to be addressed now, and is email the correct way to do so?” We are often driven to be reactive rather than proactive by being blasted with emails, so we blast them right back.

Many people mistake urgent email activity for productivity, but that activity is rarely appropriate, strategic or creative. Email unconsciously prevents you from taking action on those higher priority, strategic and, sometimes, uncomfortable activities.

Tried and tested communication tools

It is worth considering how you could tackle those challenges head on, by returning to the tried and tested, direct, old-fashioned, communication tools of the telephone and voice instead of believing in the mentality that email will help you stay on top of whatever is happening. It may even reduce the stress in your day.

Some reports suggest that limiting the use of email helped workers to make decisions. One stated that, “Outlawing internal email for a week challenged us not only to be more thoughtful about what we worked on, but also to be more deliberate about what we addressed and with whom.”

This suggests that, once we have realised that emails will not in fact achieve the best solution to all our issues, then we can concentrate on the most pressing priorities. This means our days will become more productive, less stressful and more focused.

The use of technology has made us neglect our hitherto old fashioned methods of communication. The re-establishment of human interaction is a much more powerful tool than email when resolving a conflict, managing a task or being creative.

Some activities are still perfectly suited to the use of email in an office. The following list is taken from a report by a company which prohibited the use of internal emails for one week, and it makes for interesting reading.

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- *Conveying simple, defined information.* Agendas for meetings, say, or directions to a location. This is just data-driven content, and no questions are being asked of the recipients.
- *Delegating clear administrative tasks.* “Send this document” or “Attend this meeting”. Restrict these emails to very clear, no questions needed tasks.
- *Transmitting an attachment.* After you have agreed in a conversation about the task at hand, email is a good way to send someone the relevant documents. Email is a courier service, not a project management tool.
- *Documenting or summarising a completed conversation.* “Here are the minutes of our project meeting.” “Here’s what I heard in the performance review you just gave me.” Email is a good summarising tool after the fact to ensure clarity.

Yet more extraordinary mobile phone statistics!

At the end of the 3rd quarter 2012, some amazing statistics have been published, showing the growth in the proliferation of mobile phones. Here is a selection of the best I have heard in recent weeks.

On Friday 26th October 2012 on the BBC Today program Gary Kovacs, CEO of Mozilla Firefox, said; “Over the past 22 years, 2.5 billion people have connected to the Internet. The next 2.5 billion users will go online in the next five years.” He predicts that most of this second group will come from developing countries, and many will be below the poverty line. He also stated, “The Internet is about to go through a revolution like nothing we’ve seen in the past.” Watch this space, as he didn’t elaborate...

On 6th September 2012, Google reported that 1.3 million Android devices were being activated every single day, and 5 million iPhone 5s were sold in the first weekend after the launch in September. So Gary Kovacs’s growth prediction is hardly surprising!

The number of smartphones in use worldwide has topped 1 billion, according to figures released on Wednesday 17th October by Strategy Analytics. The research firm said the milestone was reached in Q3 2012, 16 years after the first smartphone was launched. It predicts that the next billion will be achieved in less than three years (by 2015). “We estimate one in seven of the world’s population owned a smartphone in the third quarter of 2012,” said Neil Mawston, Executive Director at Strategy Analytics.

All extraordinary numbers! We are also getting news of some very interesting results following field trials of new technologies, such as

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the ability to download a full HD movie in 2 minutes using 4G LTE.
We'll be reporting on this in future issues.

Roger Horner of e3 Systems

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