Clawing Back Wasted Time, Quick and Easy

Often wonder why people don't use their email programs well. Is it lack of time? Lack of creative thinking? Lack of interest? I know it is partially lack of knowledge, but that is easily solved by posing a question to the omnipotent Microsoft Help.

Or heaven forbid, by taking the time to scroll through the menus (ribbons) and read the explanations of the functions and what they do.

Two things I'm sure of, though. First, most people spend a lot of work time in their email programs, and second, I could accomplish in five minutes what could take others hours. Even though we think the young generation is great with software and computers, the one area of expertise they don't have is working within Outlook, since they've grown up on either Hotmail or Gmail. Most haven't a clue how to work productively on Outlook or Lotus Notes, the software of most offices.

Let me give you three easy time-saving examples. Alone, none represents a huge saving. But just as raindrops soon add up to a pool, so do the seconds you save. Over a year you claw back hours of wasted time.

Signatures

How many emails do you send a year? Is it in the thousands? I'm sure you know about email signatures by now - your ability to automatically "sign" each email you send.

If you're manually adding these details at the end of the email, what a waste of time! You can set them up to be automatically included (In Outlook: Tools > Options > Mail format > Signatures). I would suggest setting a signature even for your home computer. Include at least your telephone number and your name.

When you send an email that requires action, you want to make it as easy as can be for someone to get back to you, don't you? Don't make them hunt around for your contact details.

If appropriate, you can also be clever and make signatures work for the business. Here are some examples:

* Marketing specials of the week/month.

* Different signatures to different customer groups.

* Offer subscriptions to your newsletter.

* Send them to your website with a hyperlink.

* Have links to your social media sites.

* Educate. Add a tip of the month.

Just don't go overboard and make your signatures too long: name, title, company, address, phone, web address.

Replies

Next, how many emails do you reply to in a year? Thousands again?

At the end of each of your thousands of replies, you probably always sign off by typing in a thank you and your name. If you don't, people might consider you rude and curt. Which is fine if your name is Curt, but otherwise not so good.

You probably have not looked in the Signature menu and noticed you can create a "reply" signature - one that is automatically inserted into all your replies and forwards. Take a look now (same location as mentioned above). If you haven't already created a reply signature do so today. It might save only two or three seconds for each email, but multiply it by thousands.

Repeat text

Ever send emails that use the same wording over and over again?

Who said that signatures can only be used for signatures? Why not create separate signatures for all those phrases you repeat during the course of the year? For example, asking for paperwork, reports, proposals, quotes you send out. Answering the same questions coming in from your website. Saying thank you.

Even better, you can put a signature on top of a signature on top of a signature. This means you can build up proposals, different clauses - all manner of clever things can be done. How?

Using Lotus Notes, you can do this with signatures but it's far easier to set up each repetitive phrase as a different stationery. In Outlook, through to Office 2003, open and click in the body of an email. Then select Insert > Signature. Office 2007-2010 allows only one signature to be used at a time. A new feature, however, has been introduced, Quick Parts. Microsoft describes Quick Parts as the ability to "insert reusable pieces of content including fields, document properties or any preformatted snippets you create". Following the instructions above select Insert > Quick Parts.

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