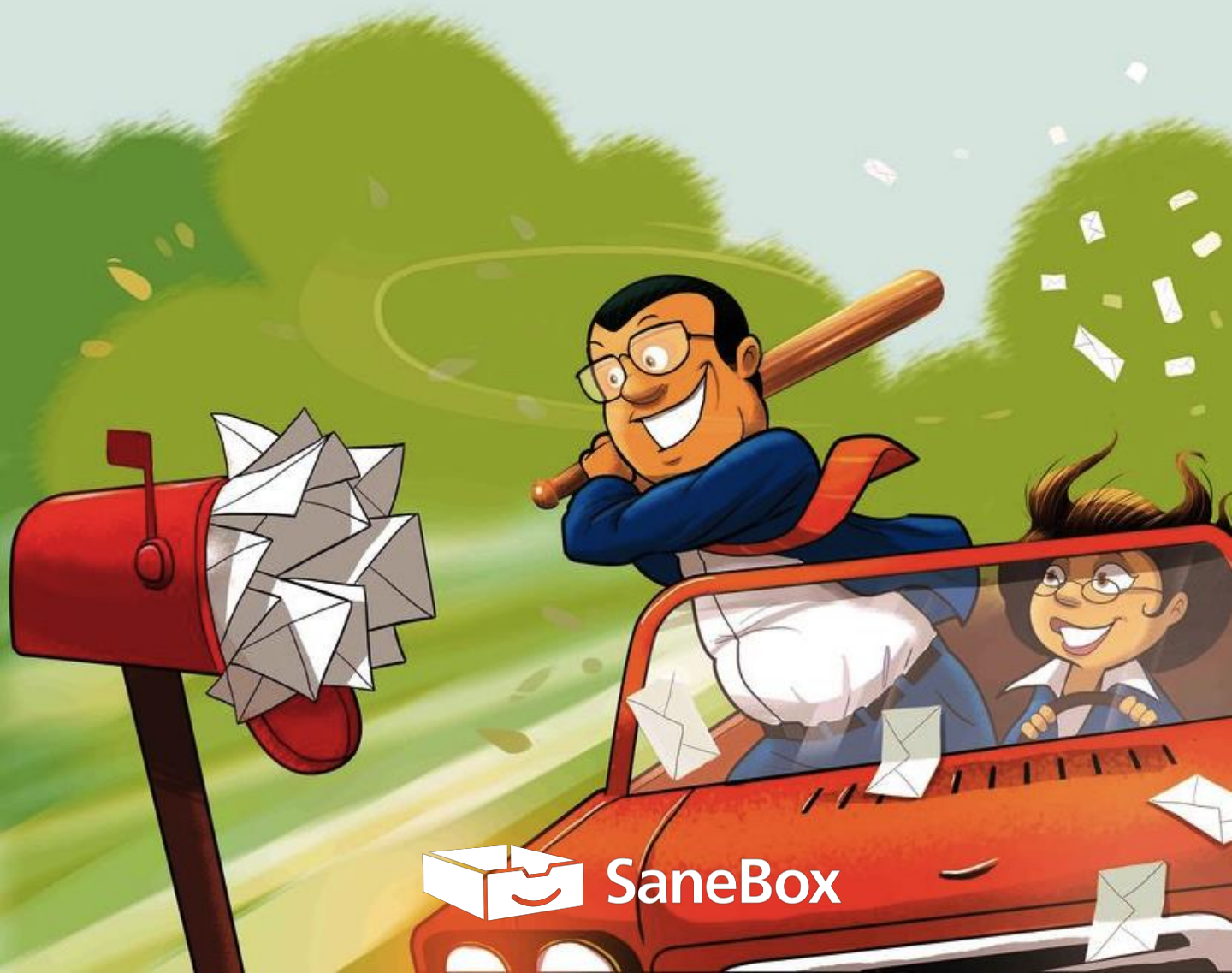# How to Outsmart Your Inbox

25 Email Tricks for Busy Professionals

SaneBox

Email Overload is a Global Epidemic

It's hard to believe when the movie "You've Got Mail" came out in 1998, people actually looked forward to opening their inbox.

28% of our work time

13 hours a week

650 hours a year

According to a recent McKinsey study, today an average employee spends 13 hours/week reading and replying to emails a completely reactive activity, which is not part of anyone's job description.

Share this:

At SaneBox, we've spent the last 3 years helping professionals fall in love with their email again. We've done lots of research, talked to thousands of customers and compiled a list of tricks to help you get to Inbox Zero every day. Most of them are extremely easy, while others will take some discipline.

Follow the steps in this book, and we promise you'll wish you got more email. Just like back in 1998!

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Email is Like Tetris

Clearing your inbox feels productive. There's an instant gratification. But just like in Tetris, no matter how good you are, more emails will keep coming, and faster.

Today an average professional gets 110 emails/day (not spam - real emails). By 2015 it will be 125/day. Since days in 2015 will still only be 24 hours long, something has to change – you.

You need to change the way you think about email, and the way you process it. Let this sink in! Then move on to Commandment #2.

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Commandment 2:
Email ≠ Your #1 Priority

Email is the first thing we focus on when we get to work and we get sucked in. It becomes our **default #1 priority**.

The problem is email is a To-Do list other people can write on. So when "doing email" is your main focus, you're letting other people dictate your priorities! The only way to combat this is our Scan-Block-Ask system:

➤ **Scan** your Inbox for urgent and important items, and take care of them first thing in the morning. Then close your Inbox and work on your top priorities

➤ **Block** 30-60 minute appointments on your calendar later in the day for processing email.

➤ **Ask** yourself if clearing your Inbox is the **best use of time right now** if you get sucked into "doing email"

Share this commandment:

This is by far the hardest lesson in this book. To make it easier, set up the 1 hour daily appointment at 1pm to clear your Inbox. Do it right now!

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Commandment 3:
Not All Emails Are Created Equal

Every email interface gives the same amount of real estate on the screen to each message. This tricks our brain into thinking every email is equally important.

Consciously we know this is wrong, but it's hard for our subconscious to differentiate. And this costs us time. [90 seconds](#) for every interruption, to be exact.

There are 3 kinds of emails:

> **Urgent/important**: deal with these right away

> **Non-urgent/important**: these can wait

> **Unimportant**: these should be archived or deleted in bulk. Unfortunately these emails comprise 58% of an average Inbox.

Share this commandment:

Dealing with them appropriately will make all the difference in the world.

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This is where SaneBox comes in

1. SaneBox automatically filters **unimportant** emails into a separate folder so you can archive or delete them all at once when you have time.

2. You can move the **non-urgent/important** emails into one of our [Snooze folders](#) and they will reappear in your Inbox when you're ready.

3. The only emails left in your Inbox will be the **important** ones you'll deal with today

17 Simple Email Tricks

1

Bulk-process your bacn
Spam has largely been solved, but the new evil is bacn (pronounced "bacon"). It's legitimate emails (newsletters, social media alerts etc) but they don't deserve to interrupt your day. You need to process these messages in bulk (SaneBox filters these emails into a separate folder and summarizes them in a digest).

2

Don't unsubscribe from suspicious emails
Unsubscribing from suspicious emails can result in more junk mail because you're exposing yourself as a real person (who actually reads emails) to a potential spammer. Instead use SaneBlackHole - it will simply put all future emails from those senders directly into Trash.

3

Don't fill out the recipient's address right away
Have you ever had fast fingers and hit "send" before finishing the email? From now on, leave the "To" field blank until you've proof-read the email.

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4

Bold key phrases

If your email is on the longer side, highlight key words or sentences **in bold**. This will make their job easier and you'll be a more efficient communicator. Don't do all caps (THAT'S YELLING!) and don't bold too much – it will lose its impact**.**

This is one of the easiest tricks in this book and offers the biggest bang for the buck. Try bolding the key phrase this in the next email you send.

5

Don't (always) email

Before you hit send, review the email and evaluate whether the message will suck you into a long thread. If so, pick up the phone. Or walk over, and speak to him/her in person.

6

Don't use your Inbox as an archive

Using your Inbox as an archive goes against every productivity method out there. It's the equivalent of stuffing your snail mail back into your mailbox after reading it. It's terrible for your productivity, and for your subconscious. Don't do it. Archive it all now and start fresh! We'll discuss how to process your Inbox in the Inbox Zero Rules section later.

7 Don't be the CC backseat driver

Chances are if you're on the CC line of an email, the sender thought you should be aware of the message, but they probably don't need a response from you. Unless you're specifically asked a question, let the people in the "to" line handle it and maybe sit this one out (and try SaneBox's SaneCC feature).

8 Always check if you're BCC'ed (not CC'ed) before hitting "Reply All"

BCC is kind of a dirty trick - only the sender knows that you got the email. And there's nothing more embarrassing for the sender than to have you "Reply All". You just made him/her look sleazy for trying to hide something from everyone else (if you're the boss then it's ok, of course).

9 Use templates

Ever find yourself typing the same sentences over and over? Then you should be using email templates. Read through your sent mail and see what types of messages you are regularly sending, then put them in a template.

The easiest way to manage templates is via the Signature feature. here's how to make this work in Outlook, Notes, and Gmail.

10 The death thread spiral

Email threads can quickly balloon into dozens of emails and numerous recipients. Before continuing the thread and adding to the madness, decide if a) a phone conference is better, b) some people should be removed from the thread, c) it makes sense to start a new thread altogether.

11 Don't put images in your signature

They look like attachments, and make things confusing. Looking for an email with an actual attachment becomes painful. And if this email becomes a thread, the image will get replicated to the bottom of every single email. Don't do it!

12 An un-hackable but easy (for you) to remember password

Everything lives in your email, so it's critical to have a strong password for it. Here's how. Think of a phrase (like a refrain from a song, or some sentence you remember by heart) and make the first letters of every word your password.

"Billy Jean is not my lover, she's just a girl who claims that i am the one" becomes **bjinmlsjagwctiat1** - a 17 character password that's impossible to break but easy to remember. But it's critical that you never use the same password for multiple services – so if one of them is compromised, others are safe!

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13

Scheduling for the pros

We certainly don't mean to put assistants out of business, but scheduling meetings doesn't need to be difficult. We use ScheduleOnce, but if you prefer to do it the old fashioned way, here are some tips:

14

Use the subject wisely

This might seem obvious but you'll be surprised how many people just scan the subject line, and delete the email if it doesn't seem relevant to them. Put a call to action into it. "5 things I need you to do tomorrow" is much better than "Things". It also makes searching for mail much easier. Consider adding the following:

- ➢ **[Time Sensitive]**
- ➢ **[Action Item]**
- ➢ **[NNTR, NRN or FYI]**: put one of these 3 at the end of the subject line (this means No Need to Reply, No Reply Necessary or For Your Information), it will make the recipient feel good knowing they can just enjoy reading your email and not have to do anything.
- ➢ **[EOM]**: If you can fit the entire message into the subject line, put EOM at the end (End of Message) and they won't have to open the message.

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15 No open-ended questions

Have you ever ended a long email with "Thoughts?" If you answered yes to this question, then you are evil. Instead, be specific. Say "Do you think we should do X, Y or Z?"

16 Don't bury the lead

If you're writing an email that has action items, list them first, followed by the content. Most people reverse this process. However, by adding the action steps first, you are effectively giving the reader context to the action items, and you are automatically helping them construct a plan of attack before they are even done reading the email.

17 Turn Off Email Notifications

Turn them off on your phone, tablet and computer. Allowing every email that arrives in your inbox to interrupt your day destroys your productivity. A case study conducted by the Danwood Group found it takes 1.5 minutes on average to read and recover from an email. The amount of time you'll waste on unimportant interruptions will add up.

Here's how you can turn off notifications on your iPhone, Android, or Outlook

What is Inbox Zero?

Inbox Zero is not just "having no emails in your Inbox", its' also a process for how to achieve that state consistently. It's based on the Getting Things Done (GTD) principles and it takes lots of discipline, but there are some hacks.

The main premise of Inbox Zero is to never read the same email twice. There are only 5 possible actions for each email in your Inbox:

Delete
Delegate
Defer
Respond
Do

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5 Inbox Zero Rules

Delete or Archive

If you can tell by the subject line and sender that the email is not important - just delete or archive it without opening. It's critical to process these messages in bulk (SaneBox can help with that).

Delegate

If someone on your team can deal with one of your emails - by all means, forward it on. One helpful trick is to use **SaneReminders** to remind you if the person you delegated to doesn't get back to you by a certain time.

Defer

If an email is not urgent until later, most people tend to leave it in the Inbox. This causes you to look at it (i.e. spend time and focus on) over and over. A much better way is to move it out of your Inbox. SaneBox offers another tool for this - **Snooze Folders**. Move an email into one of them, and the email will pop back in your Inbox at a predetermined time - when it becomes actionable.

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5 Inbox Zero Rules

Respond

If an email is really urgent, or if a response will take under 2 minutes, reply right away. Don't waste time thinking of what to do with it.

Do

These are emails that actually require you to do work. This is the one part SaneBox can't help you with. But if you are diligent with the steps above, the only "Do" emails in your Inbox are the ones you will work on and process today.

At the end of the day there's nothing better than dragging all your unprocessed emails to the [SaneTomorrow Snooze folder](#) and seeing the magical empty Inbox. Even though it seems like cheating (it is – they will reappear tomorrow morning), the feeling of accomplishment is good for you!

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Learned something new? Share this book with your friends and help spread the sanity!

bit.ly/outsmartyourinbox