

Time management

If your email inbox is out of control, what can you do to organise it, gain more control and improve your responses?

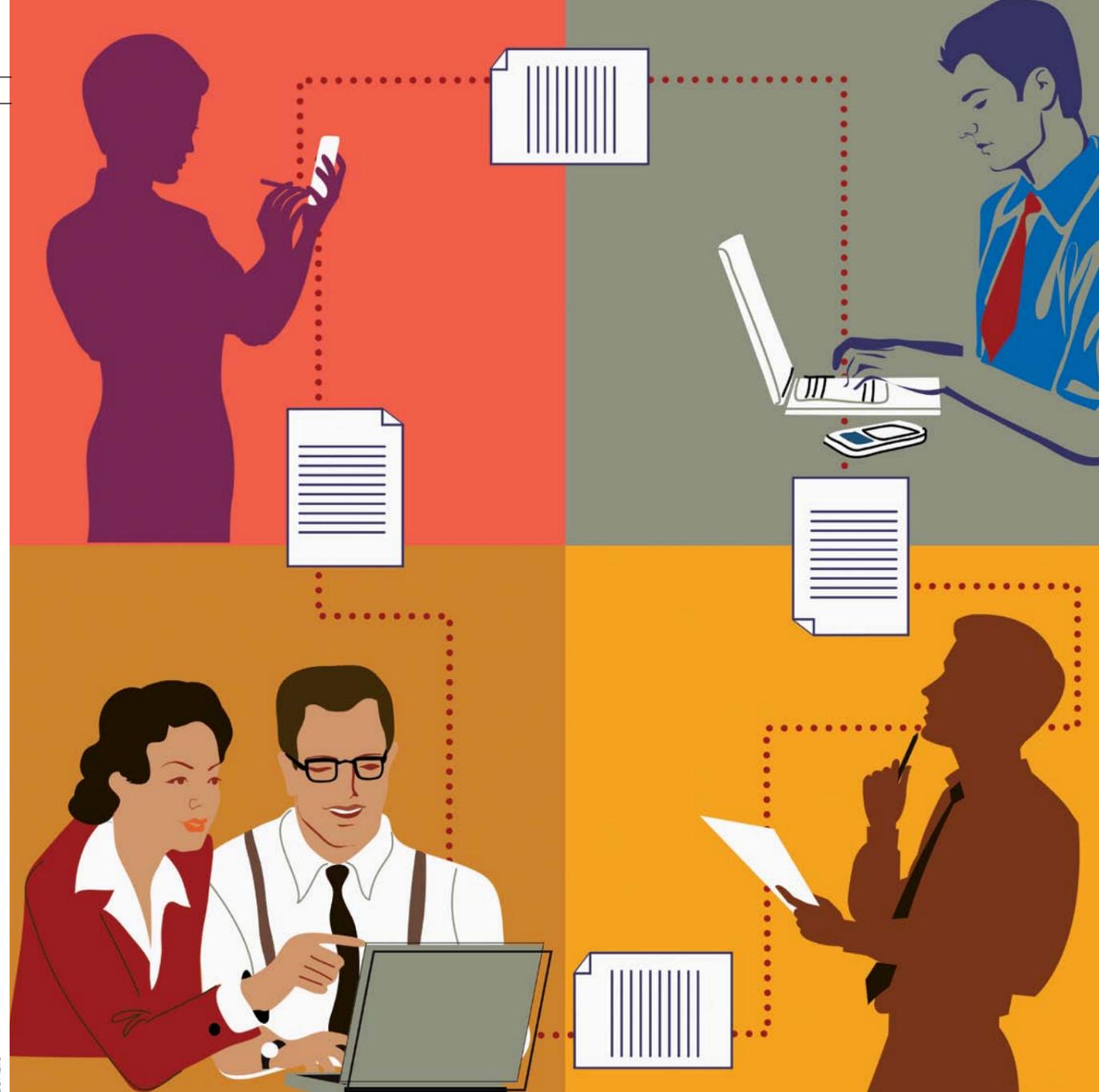
It's believed that 247m emails are sent on average per day – no wonder you voted email your number one workplace distraction in the recent webinar on time management.

So how can you better manage emails? There are two sides to this – the first is becoming more efficient at dealing with your inbox. Techniques here include turning off the automatic notifications, only looking at emails two or three times a day and making use of the colour-flagging functions to categorise emails according to importance and/or urgency. And if you haven't tried any of these, give them a go.

The second approach is to reduce the number you get in the first place. You could

certainly become more ruthless in unsubscribing. I'm a sucker for signing up to email bulletins or feeds and then losing interest in the content. Every so often I'll simply sort my inbox by sender to see how many come from these third parties. It doesn't take long to find the unsubscribe button and it really does reduce the volume coming in. Obviously I never

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need to do this with my ICAEW emails!

Some companies have taken dealing with email addiction a step further and actually ban internal emails at certain times of the week. The two effects are that staff actually talk to each other rather than relying on email and, of course, it reduces distractions so they can get on with all those important tasks on their to-do lists.

And if like me, you find that the same one or two tasks make repeated appearances on your to-do lists then I have one word for you – BANJO. My first manager taught me this one and it is quite simply a reminder to find an hour every few days to BANJO – Bang A Nasty Job Off. Typically, there'll always be a few things you know you need to do but would rather not. They

may involve a little bit of extra effort, a difficult conversation with someone or just going outside your comfort zone. However my experience is that if you do apply yourself to it, it's never as bad as you thought it would be and gives you a tremendous sense of achievement – and dare I say smugness – for the rest of the day. Good luck. ■

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NEGOTIATION SKILLS

How FAB are you?



In my recent webinar on negotiation skills, I described the Persuasion Pyramid, a straightforward model that sets out five levels of persuasion, applicable when you're communicating with your audience.

Often when we're negotiating of course, the broader context is that we're selling and this can require a few additional skills. It may be that we're selling our expertise as chartered accountants to a potential client; it might be we're pitching a project idea internally or even trying to sell ourselves into a new job. Whatever the circumstances, a simple mnemonic here is FAB – Features Advantages Benefits – a useful reminder not to bombard our audience with descriptions or terminology that mean more to us than to them.

So, for example we might start our pitch by saying: "Pick me, I'm a chartered accountant."

Well this is simply a feature – you and I both know this description is shorthand for multi-skilled business

professional but it might not say that to your prospect. It's too much about you and not them. I am of course doing a disservice here to ICAEW, which is working tremendously hard to inform public and business opinion about us chartered accountants. Forgive me.

So the next level up is to think "what is the advantage of this feature?" In this case you might say: "Pick me, I'm a chartered accountant with six years' experience in this industry."

Remember not to bombard the audience with descriptions or terminology that mean more to us than them

Well that's certainly better, and industry experience may well mean more to the other person than your qualification alone. But can you extend this further? I suggest you can, by adding the benefit: "Pick me, I'm a chartered accountant with six years' experience in this industry, so I can help you take advantage of some of the opportunities out there that your competitors will miss."

Brilliant! You've established your credibility by talking very much in terms of their bottom line and are now more likely to have their full attention.

Less prosaically, I've seen this technique called the "So What?" test. Assume your client/colleague/interviewer will be asking this question in response to everything you say (hopefully just to themselves rather than directly to you, but you never know.)

So next time you're selling, just make sure you spend more time talking "Them" than "You". Trust me... I'm a chartered accountant.