

European Workers Spend 3.5 Years of their Lives dealing with Irrelevant Email

- **Plantronics research reveals at least 2 hours each day are spent on email**
- **Email found to have a negative impact on organisational performance & collaboration**
- **Phone conversations found to speed decision making and improve message clarity**

14 May 2007. According to independent research on workplace communications commissioned by Plantronics, European managers spend at least two hours per day dealing with email communications. This equates to a staggering ten years of a worker's life spent emailing. [\[1\]](#)

According to the survey of over 180 senior managers, conducted by the Henley Management College, three and a half years of a working life spent emailing are a complete waste of time, since 32% of messages read and sent are considered irrelevant.

The Plantronics study discovered that there is an explosion in email traffic taking place, every mail sent generates a trail of between four to six additional items popping up in your inbox. The extensive use of email, particularly for internal transactions is being questioned by managers as a substitute for face-to-face or voice discussion, particularly as email is seen to prolong decision-making.

The study shows that, used effectively, email can help improve process and the sharing of information as well as support decision making, however if not used smartly it can create a faceless environment, reduce the ability of the individual to act and put an emphasis on protecting one's own position. In contrast, speaking on the phone was found to put a stop to the generation of further email traffic, often clarifying issues and speeding up decision making.

There are also additional benefits to simply making a call. Using a phone with a wireless headset is increase work related productivity by 23% by allowing workers to multi-task and concentrate more effectively. [\[2\]](#)

However, despite the proven effectiveness of the phone as a communication tool, the study shows workers rarely pick up the phone, discussing complex issues via email in front of large audiences. Since only 43% of managers surveyed felt that a tiny proportion (10%) of emails sent clearly conveyed the intended message such messages only serve to create more inbox debris to clear.

Time wasted on email also has social implications as workers interact less with each other. Where speaking on the phone was actually found to build relationships, use of email was seen to weaken them.

The 'any time any place' approach to work enabled by Information communications technology (ICT) has the benefit of reducing overheads and allows for flexible working schemes. However the increasing 24/7 nature of customer and client demands is impacting the lives of employees by intruding into home-life and creating even more email as over a third of managers carry a PDA. The temptation to check your email for anything important late at night and at weekends is hard to resist – as is the desire to respond just to show that you have read it.

Peter Thomson, Director of The Future Work Forum at Henley Management College says, “Our research proves that email use is out of control, often causing confusion and inertia. It also paints a bleak picture of silent offices where colleagues email rather than talk face to face. However there is a solution and its very simple – make a phone call with a headset and start talking, email should just be used to firm-up and recap on what everyone has agreed on the phone. “

Philip Vanhoutte, European Managing Director, Plantronics says, “Our results show that the phone is used as a secondary communication tool and email the first ,despite the negative impact it has on employee productivity, wellbeing and the company’s bottom line. Managers need to encourage greater use of the telephone and teach people how to effectively use a range of information communications technology products to support decision making, networking and increase workers flexibility. “

[1] 2 hours per day = 25% of time over an average 8 hour working day. Working life is 40 years, so 25% of the working life equals to 10 working years

[2] Study conducted by E3 Consulting Corporation on the 15/5/04