



# MOST IMPORTANT

WAYS TO REDUCE  
EMAIL OVERLOAD  
@ WORK

# F

ew companies are immune to email overload inside their organization today, *it's costly and needs to be managed.*



#### For example:

- Our research has found that on average employees spend **71 hours on irrelevant email per year.**
- For one Fortune 100 client, research showed that irrelevant emails cost them **\$909,000** per day and **\$236 million** per year.
- Only **40%** of employees at that organization say emails frequently answer their questions and that the content is relevant to them.
- We also found some of the top issues employees list with work-related emails:
  - Having too many back-and-forth replies: **30%**
  - Using email when a meeting/phone call would be more appropriate: **19%**
  - Using reply-all: **26%**
  - Being poorly written/unclear: **24%**

It's no secret that email overload is a huge issue for many organizations and has an equally big impact on the kinds of alternatives and investments needed to reach your internal audiences when email can no longer be counted on.

At The Grossman Group, we work with companies to tackle the email monster head on and help employees use email differently. Here are some of the most important strategies and takeaways:



**1. Identify email personas and attack the bad behaviors**.....p. 3



**5. Ensure that leaders set the tone on email**.....p. 13



**2. Recognize email overload as a serious productivity issue**.....p. 6



**6. Recognize that despite its limitations, most workers still want email**.....p. 15



**3. Get to the heart of your specific email problem**.....p. 8



**7. Accept that email is here to stay (at least for the near future)**.....p. 17



**4. Diversify your email options**.....p. 10





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*Identify email personas and attack the bad behaviors*



One of the key elements of a recent campaign we worked on with a global healthcare company was the use of “**Email Personas**” to help employees identify and tackle bad email habits. These personas were a funny and effective way to pinpoint the classic bad behaviors that we all use—but that contribute greatly to the overload.

As part of that campaign, we also put together a customized “Email Etiquette Guide” that offered tips on how to use email better and provided more details on how to combat the bad behavior that everyone can identify with.

This type of campaign has already produced a nearly 20 percent reduction in email across another global company we worked with—in just six months. While the work with our healthcare client is in the early stages, the initial signs are extremely promising as well.

**All of us can occasionally see ourselves in the characters below, which is why the personas—and the use of humor—are a great way to help employees recognize what they’re doing, and get them to stop.**



### **Captain No-Context**

Bombards recipients with emails that lack a clear point and any necessary background. The Captain is on a mission to the land of ambiguity, leaving others behind and confused. If only the Captain would consider the real goal and keep the message concise, everyone would get to the destination faster.



### **Drama Queen**

Excitement abounds in the Queen’s emails that are often full of TOO MANY capital letters, exclamation points, emoticons or abbreviations. The Drama Queen needs to remember your audience will respond better when you’re courteous and professional in your correspondence—a business email is not a text message. 😊



### **The Gunslinger**

Charges into the wide open *Wild West*—a rebel without a clue—and fires off large group emails. He also responds by hitting “reply all,” instead of considering who really needs the message. Whoa Nelly! It’s time to pull in the reins and determine the best fellow travelers.



### **The Hermit**

Doesn’t lift her head up from the screen and sometimes forgets that a phone call or face-to-face conversation could produce more mutual understanding, long-term relationships, and outcomes.

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ome companies have also opted for an email “**pledge**” that outlines how they plan to use email going forward. These quick pledges can go a long way toward reinforcing the behaviors you want employees to apply every day with email.



## Take The Grossman Group's Email-Free Vacation Pledge!

- 1. I will recognize that it's important for everyone to take time off.** It's how we recharge, reconnect, and get re-energized to be at our best.
- 2. I will adjust my mindset and focus on my intention to disconnect.** Going into my vacation, I will plan to not have access to email, and not engage with work. I commit to having a vacation; not a “workcation.”
- 3. I will set an example.** I will lead by example and model the importance of taking a true vacation for my staff.

- 4. I will prepare those with whom I interact regularly.** I will talk with people about how work will be managed in my absence, and that I am looking forward to a much-needed vacation. I will leave detailed status reports with my manager and will set up an out-of-office message with direction on who to contact.
- 5. I will be “present” for the right people.** Being present in person and through technology is important for our colleagues when we're at work. It's just as important to be present when we're on vacation. Work can wait a week.

- 6. I will share this pledge with my family and those with whom I am vacationing.** I will let them know my plans to disconnect and ask for their support.
- 7. I will remind myself that most problems work themselves out.** I will think about those times when I'm not available during working hours. Most often, work problems get figured out without my intervention.
- 8. I will resist the urge to re-connect on vacation.** If I'm feeling the need to check email, I will re-read steps 1-5 and re-commit, knowing a change like this is tough yet takes courage and reaps benefits.



SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_



2.

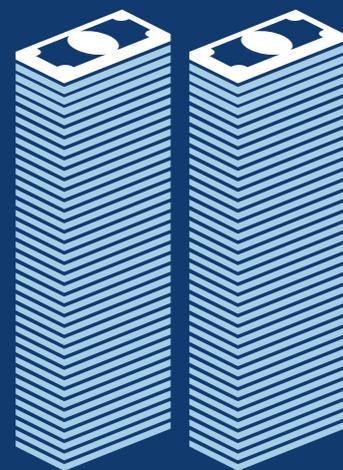
*Recognize email overload  
as a serious productivity issue*

## For years, the discussion around email volume at work centered on work-life balance. Employees complained that email at all hours was a significant contributor to workplace stress.

While that remains a concern for many employers, the lost revenue from email overload is now grabbing executives' attention even more. As more companies learn how much wasted time is spent on email, they're very motivated to do something about it. For instance, the highly publicized "Zero Email Initiative" at the global technology firm Atos grew out of a company analysis that found the average employee was spending 15 to 20 hours a week checking and answering emails.

More than three years after the CEO of Atos, Thierry Breton, announced in 2011 that he would eliminate email for internal communications within a few years, the company has indeed cut way back on its total email count. The average number of internal emails per mailbox per week at Atos dropped from 100 in 2011 to under 40 by 2013, according to the company.

One Fortune 100 company we worked with calculated that irrelevant email costs them a great deal in lost productivity. Here's just some of the numbers they identified:



**IRRELEVANT**  
EMAIL COSTS  
**\$909,000**  
PER DAY AND  
**\$236M**  
PER YEAR.



SUPERVISORS SPEND THE MOST UNPRODUCTIVE TIME ON EMAIL—AN AVERAGE OF  
**4 HOURS**  
ON EMAIL EVERY DAY

**57 MINUTES**  
OF THAT TIME IS SPENT ON  
**IRRELEVANT** EMAIL.



OTHER EMPLOYEES SPEND  
**2 HOURS**  
ON EMAIL EVERY DAY

**32 MINUTES**  
OF THAT TIME IS SPENT  
ON IRRELEVANT EMAIL.



Similarly, The Grossman Group conducted research of 1,100 executives, senior leaders, managers, and employees on their perceptions of e-mail. "The 2012 Work-Related Email Perception Study" found that middle managers feel the most pain:

MIDDLE  
MANAGERS  
TYPICALLY  
SPEND

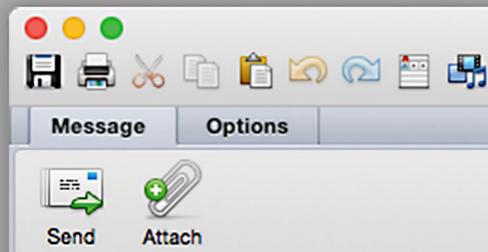


A YEAR ON  
IRRELEVANT  
EMAIL.

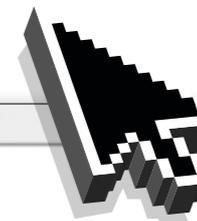
3.

*Get to the heart of your specific email problem*





## Before you can do anything about email volume, it's important to first understand the stress caused by email overload in your organization.



With that knowledge, you can then advance toward the best possible solution for your company. Here's a smart, four-step process to better understand email use at your company:

**Establish a baseline for email overload.** Decipher how email is affecting your organization to understand how email misbehaviors cause stress and limit your employees' productivity. The surveys are popular at many companies as a critical first step toward identifying just what employee pain points are when it comes to email.

**Create guidelines for email.** Help the organization make the most of email, in keeping with your culture. Progressive companies put together "Email Etiquette Guides" to remind employees of better email practices that can help cut down on total email volume.

**Walk the walk.** Actions speak louder than words. Help leaders in the organization follow the behaviors they wish to see in others. Clearly, how leaders use email will set the tone for the entire organization, for good or bad.

**Offer email training and provide opportunities for employees to self-identify their own email misbehaviors.** Humor, when used correctly, can help reinforce the right behaviors in a light-hearted yet memorable way. Email personas and videos can be a great way to drive home your messages.

Any set of guidelines or trainings you offer could be enhanced with some quick tips for employees to keep in mind when writing any email. In that spirit, The Grossman Group created its own list of:

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## DOS AND DON'TS OF EM@IL

### ✓ Do

- Keep it brief
- Share key content in the subject line
- Target the right people
- Consider the timing
- Check it twice (proofread!)

### ✗ Don't

- Email personal or confidential information
- Send unnecessary business emails (this includes "reply all" messages)
- Forward virus warnings, chain letters or junk mail
- Use sarcasm, negative comments or ALL CAPS that make recipients feel like you're shouting at them
- Use email as a replacement for personal contact

4.

*Diversify your  
email options*





While one of the most publicized efforts to “eliminate” email was from the global technology firm Atos, others have followed suit. Atos now discourages employees from sending or receiving internal emails, moving them to an enterprise social network model instead. Similarly, German car and truck maker Daimler recently launched a seemingly radical solution of its own: no email on vacation, guaranteed. Meanwhile, a French government proposal to allow some technology workers to officially sign off from emails and smartphones after 6 p.m. also generated much attention and debate.

Still, those moves remain deviations from the norm. What was lost in many of the media reports about Atos’ initiative is that it wasn’t intended to immediately eliminate email. Instead, it was designed to shift more communications among employees to other formats, at least in the short term.

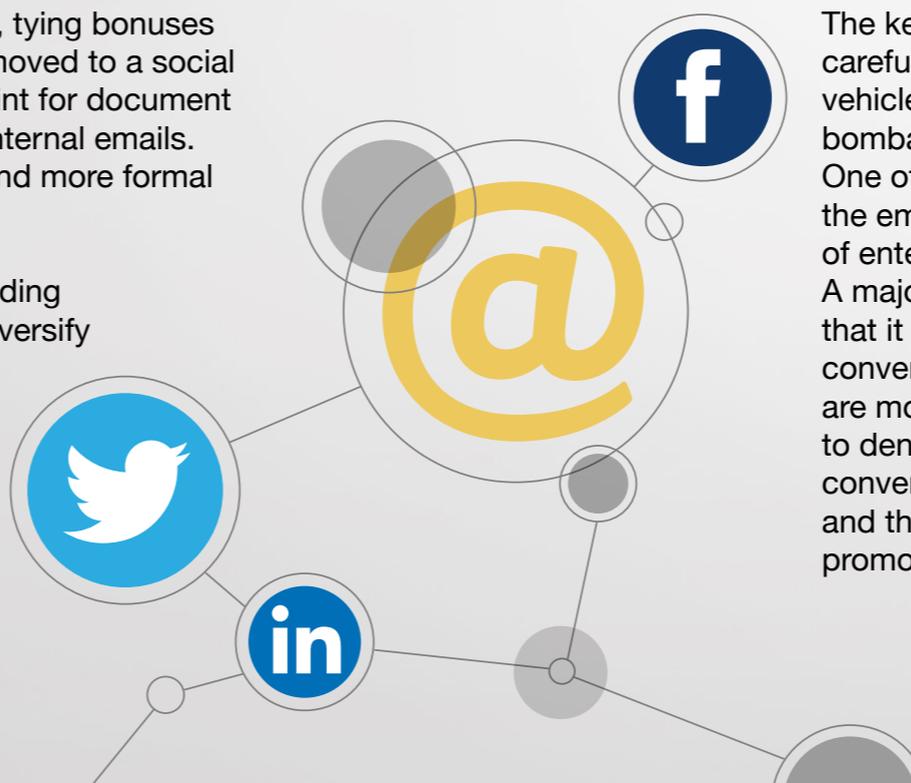
Atos recently cited a report from Gartner Research, which described Atos’ email initiative as a “big change effort”—looking to transform the way that more than 76,000 employees interact throughout 47 countries. Gartner credited Atos with making a major investment in its initiative, tying bonuses and performance evaluations to the zero-email effort. Atos moved to a social business network called blueKiwi for collaboration, Sharepoint for document management, and online meetings and chats to reduce its internal emails. The company still uses emails for external communication and more formal communications outside the company.

A number of researchers and communication experts—including The Grossman Group—have also suggested new ways to diversify

communications. One idea that has worked for some is an electronic newsletter for various departments. This could be accessed online through Intranet or Sharepoint, and employees could quickly narrow in on key information that’s stored in one easily accessible spot.

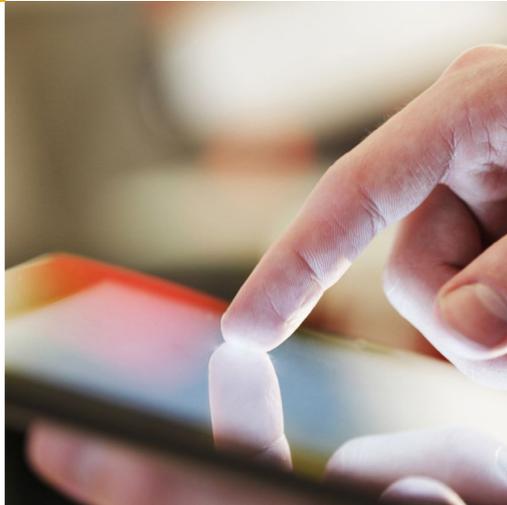
Another option is to consider turning group email discussions into online discussion forums, much like Facebook or LinkedIn chats.

The key is to make sure that you’re carefully selecting your communication vehicles in all instances, rather than bombarding employees with emails. One of the most popular ways to avoid the email flood is to use a variety of enterprise social media platforms. A major strength of social media is that it enables users to opt into the conversations and news feeds that are most meaningful to them. It’s hard to deny the importance of trending conversations, peer-to-peer sharing and the unprecedented ability to promote and scale new ideas.



# Enterprise social media enhances communication options.

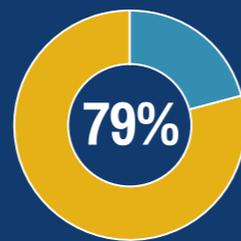
Over time, most companies have introduced software and platforms to enable employees to harness the power of social media behind the company firewalls. For instance, commenting, sharing and liking are now commonplace on company intranets, while password-protected video operate like private YouTube channels. Platforms like Yammer and Chatter combine elements of Facebook and Twitter, while company CEOs and executives are increasingly expected to blog about their experiences.



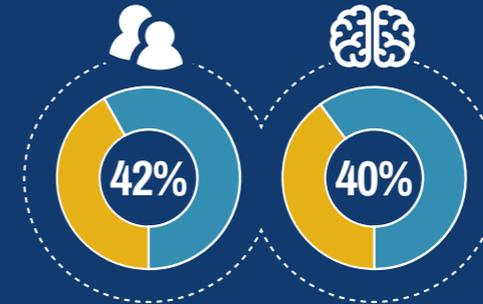
## Enterprise Social Media Could Include:

- Company blogs
- Intranet articles that enable commenting, sharing or liking
- Team sites for collaboration and idea exchange
- Social platforms like Yammer, Chatter or Jive
- Company-curated (member only) LinkedIn networks
- Behind-the-firewall video channels
- Other opt-in conversation and collaboration sites (now commonly built into intranet platforms like SharePoint)

## Enterprise Social Media adoption is on the rise, and for good reason:



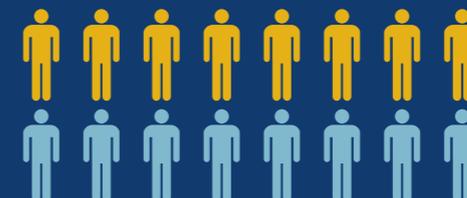
Percentage of business communicators reporting to use social tools frequently to engage employees and foster productivity.<sup>1</sup>



Increased Collaboration (42%) and Knowledge Sharing (40%) are seen as the biggest benefits of integrating social into processes.<sup>2</sup>



Percentage of employers who allow employees to speak freely (without moderation) on ESM sites.<sup>3</sup>



In 50% of organizations, employees are encouraged to use social tools in relation to their jobs.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Employee Engagement Survey by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation and Buck Consultants, 2009

<sup>2</sup>"Social in the Flow: Transforming Processes and Sharing Knowledge," AIIM Market Intelligence, 2012

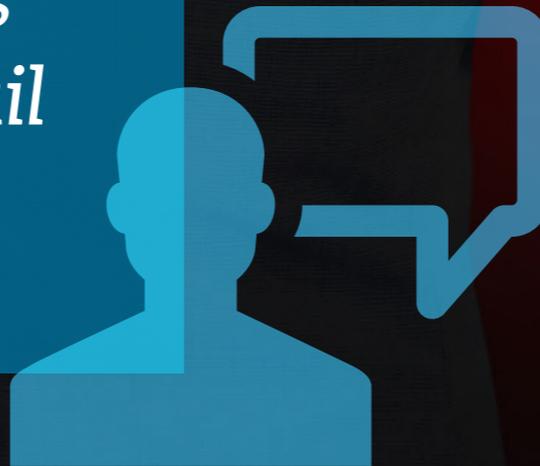
<sup>3</sup>Awareness Networks, 2009

<sup>4</sup>"Social in the Flow: Transforming Processes and Sharing Knowledge," AIIM Market Intelligence, 2012

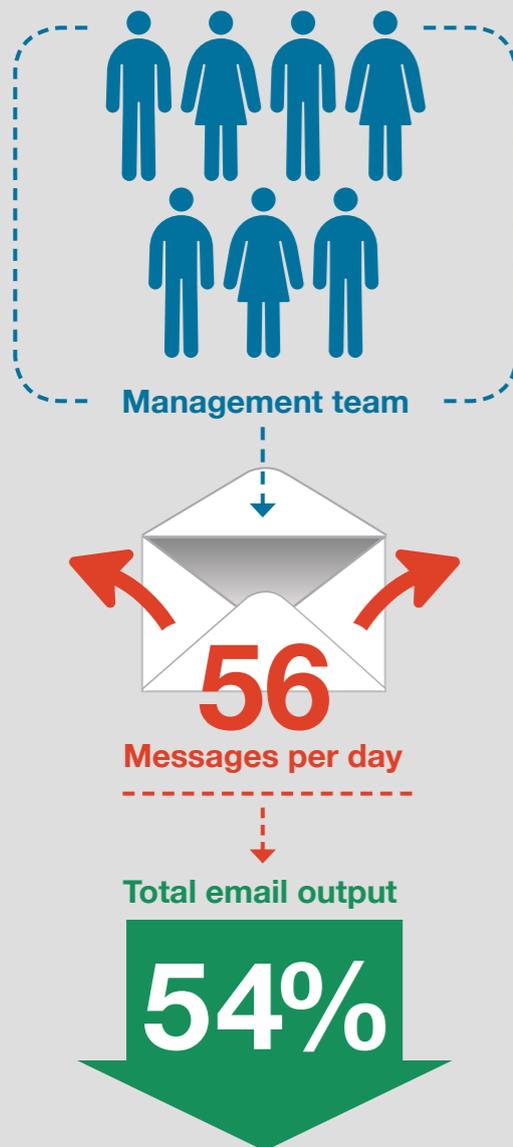


5.

*Ensure that leaders  
set the tone on email*



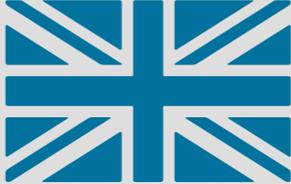
Another critical insight that's emerging on workplace email is the importance of leaders setting the tone on email use. Clearly, employees won't be able to curb email volume if their own leaders send them an inordinate amount of irrelevant emails, or if they include too many people on every email communication.



Executive training can be a key to addressing this issue. A recent *Harvard Business Review*<sup>1</sup> article highlighted the experience of a London-based company, International Power. The firm's seven-person management team wanted to increase efficiency, and initially figured there was a problem with too many lower-level employees sending emails.

Instead, the managers were shocked to learn from a detailed analysis that they personally sent an average of 56 messages a day.

The executive team went through trainings to reduce their email volume. As a result, the team's total email output dropped by 54% (according to HBR).

The other **73**  London-based employees followed suit, also reducing their email messages, even without training.

The overall result was an annual gain of

 **10,400**  
Work Hours...

...translating to a

**7%**   
Increase In Productivity

As a result of that experience, HBR suggested that companies can significantly reduce email volume by simply turning to the management team. They suggested three key tips:



Teach executives to be **more deliberate** in their e-mail use.



Ask executives to set a target for **reducing the number of messages they send**—include it in their performance goals.



Give executives **weekly feedback**.

Clearly, this company's experience shows that training top leaders truly works, and that those new practices can clearly have a trickle down effect for the entire organization.

<sup>1</sup>"To Reduce Email, Start at the Top," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2013



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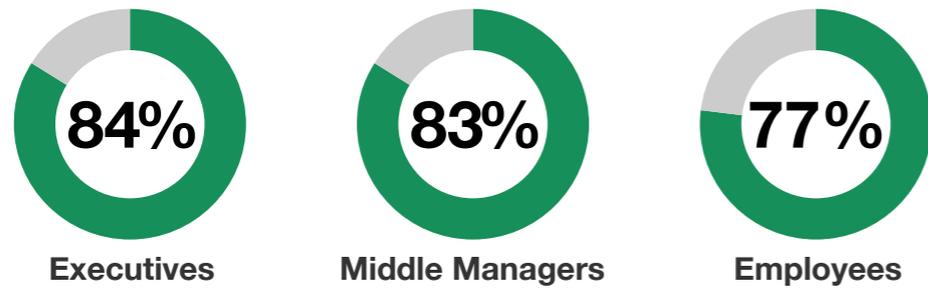
Recognize that despite its limitations, most workers still want email



If you want to make a big impact on email volume, be careful to make sure you're reflecting the culture of your organization. The fact is that many employees rely on email and actually appreciate it as a key communications tool.

Research by The Grossman Group shows that while employees want email misbehaviors addressed, they do not want their ability to use email as a communication tool curtailed. The data is revealing:

Email is seen as an effective and necessary communication tool by more than three-quarters of all audiences...



Limiting email outside normal business hours is seen as very effective by few (**11% of executives; 20% of middle managers; 13% of employees**). But, limiting email during normal business hours carries **even less** support...

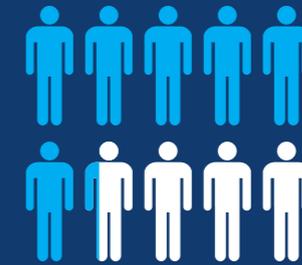


While respondents said they don't want access to email interrupted, they do want policies that address the overwhelming volumes of irrelevant emails. 61% of executives and 55% of middle managers said that email policies would be very effective in their organization.

According to a December 2014 Pew Research study<sup>1</sup>, email ranks as the

**MOST IMPORTANT**

digital tool for workers who use the Internet.



**61%**

of workers who use the Internet say email is **very important** to their jobs, according to this study.



of networked workers cite social media as very important on the job.

*“Email is to the digital age what stone-sharpening tools were in the prehistoric age—good for everything that needs to be done.”*

- Lee Rainie, director of internet, science, and technology research at the Pew Research Center.

*“Email has proven its worth on the job as the foundational ‘social media’ day by day even as rival technologies arise. It was the killer app 45 years ago for the early ARPANET and it continues to rule workplaces despite threats like spam and phishing and competitors like social networking and texting.”*

<sup>1</sup>“Email Rules the Workplace,” Pew Research Center Report, December 2014



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*Accept that email is here to stay (at least for the near future)*



At The Grossman Group, we wholeheartedly believe that email will remain a key communication vehicle in the immediate future. It's not about eliminating email to be more effective. Instead, it's about choosing to use the right vehicles for the message.

When leaders and employees learn to think of email as simply one of many communication choices, they will naturally use it more productively, relevantly, and politely.

A further way to ensure that email is used correctly is to think about the desired outcome **before** any communication. What needs to be accomplished? Would a different action advance to the outcome faster or more efficiently? Would a five-minute phone call or face-to-face discussion help accelerate the project further, faster?



#### What Email Is Good For:

- Informing others of a decision/achievement/event
- Recapping action items
- Scheduling meetings
- Setting expectations
- Setting timelines
- Distributing written confirmation of previously discussed information
- Sharing documents or pre-read materials



#### What Email Is Not Good For:

- Conflict resolution
- Decision-making (unless it's easy)
- Presenting complicated information to achieve understanding and alignment
- Explaining changes or redirections that have immediate or direct implications for how someone needs to execute their work
- Tough conversations
  - Use email only to document what's discussed afterward

As all of these strategies illustrate, there is a better way to use email in companies today, and there are many new options for making better use of it in business. While work-life balance concerns remain a key driver of these policies, new data outlining just how much money is lost in unproductive time on email is certainly a key motivator as well.

As we saw with one of our own clients, nothing speaks louder than

**\$236M  
IN LOST**

**REVENUE PER YEAR**

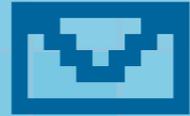


due to time spent on irrelevant email.

The encouraging news is that progressive companies are recognizing that the email monster inside their firms can indeed be contained, making their workforces more productive, engaged and ultimately...



**MORE  
SUCCESSFUL.**



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<http://linkd.in/1L3iw43>





**David Grossman**, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA

David helps leaders drive productivity and get the results they want through authentic and courageous leadership and communication. He's a sought-after speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 leaders, and author of the highly-acclaimed books, *You Can't **NOT** Communicate: Proven Communication Solutions That Power the Fortune 100*, and its follow-up, *You Can't **NOT** Communicate 2*.

David counsels leaders at top organizations to unleash the power of strategic internal communication and drive performance. Clients include AOL, DuPont Pioneer, GlaxoSmithKline, HTC, Johnson & Johnson, Lockheed Martin, McDonald's, Microsoft, Motel 6, Nielsen, Symantec, and Tyco to name a few. He's Founder and CEO of The Grossman Group, an award-winning Chicago-based strategic leadership development and internal communications consultancy, and teaches at Columbia University, NYC. David has been featured in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

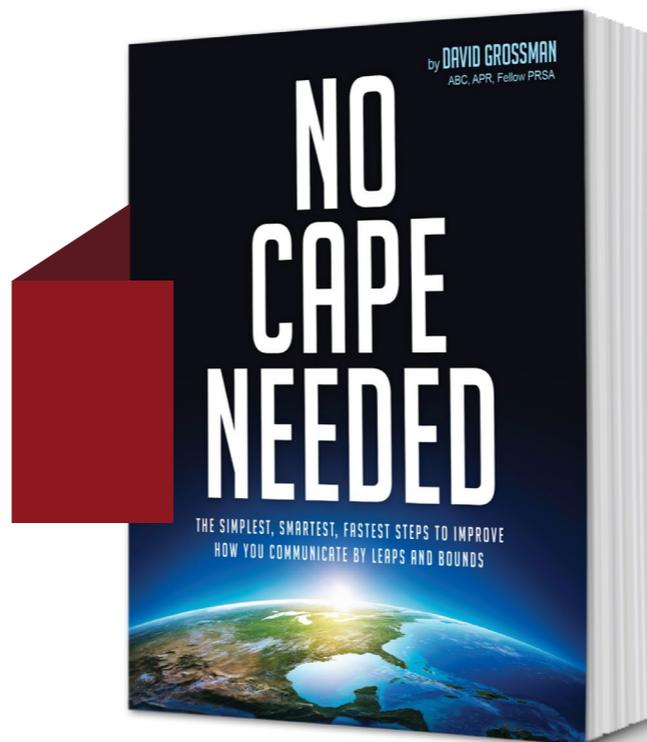


Chicago Tribune

Los Angeles Times

# NO CAPE NEEDED

The Simplest, Smartest,  
Fastest Steps to Improve  
How You Communicate  
by Leaps and Bounds



COMING  
August 2015

By **David Grossman**  
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