

Why not replying to emails speaks volumes about you

 By [Marie Rocher](#)

18 Oct 2013

In the course of my working day, I send and receive a great many emails - just like any other busy professional. As a small business owner who places a high premium on providing great service, I prioritise responding to email queries within 24 hours, or sooner.

Lately, I've been grappling with why other people don't do the same. Ignoring emails has become de rigueur - and sadly it doesn't just speak to our immense workloads, it's a reflection of the lack of civility and decorum which pervades modern society.

Why don't people respond to emails?

Emails which commonly disappear into the internet ether are:

- Requests for project details, information, feedback or status updates
- Project handovers (in our case, this would be when we hand over copy to clients)
- Queries about invoices

- Complaints (or compliments, even) about products or services.

The most obvious reason emails like those above remain unanswered is that people are overworked and overwhelmed. It's a phenomenon known as 'email overload' and it's been likened to [fighting a forest fire with a bucket](#).

Email overload is popularly attributed to downsizing due to the economy (which leaves fewer people to do more work) and a marked increase in email traffic (now compounded by social media notifications). Other reasons include:

- Putting aside an email in order to draft a more meaningful, thoughtful reply later, then forgetting all about it as other emails and tasks pile up
- Fearing that replying may unleash an avalanche of unwanted correspondence
- Not knowing how best to respond to a query, particularly if it's a difficult one
- Not knowing how to say no to a query
- A lack of time and task management skills

- A lack of courtesy towards and consideration for others, as digital channels impersonalise human communications.

Are you saying we must respond to every email we get?

Not necessarily. Let's be clear - none of us likes to indulge time wasters. Emails we can all safely ignore include:

- Spam from dodgy service providers or salesmen - delete
- Email chain letters which threaten bad things if we refuse to forward them - delete
- Emails featuring sparkly effects, hearts and teddy bears - delete
- Jokes - have a chuckle, then delete.

Remember, no message is a message!

Email is an important channel for brand communication and what you say - and don't say - reflects on your brand. Not replying to emails, then, sends out a very powerful message. To those awaiting a reply, the silence is deafening. It screams:

- Your query is just not a priority in my life
- I'm too important to indulge you right now, or perhaps ever
- I don't value our relationship highly enough to give you the information you need
- I'm not up to the task of managing my inbox, let alone managing this project
- I don't agree with, or like, the information with which you've presented me but I'm a passive-aggressive jerk who can't face issues head-on.

How to get email overload under control

Your service providers are busting their chops to deliver the products or services you need to run an efficient, profitable business and your customers are spending their hard-earned cash to buy these products and services - don't give them the silent treatment when they request information from you!

Here are some tips for managing your emails and communicating more effectively...

- Recognise that non-communication is communication and that not responding to an email leaves the other party in the lurch (rude and inconsiderate!)
- Activate an email auto-responder which politely lets people know that you've received their email and will respond to it in due course
- Block off time each day to attend to your emails, and ensure its distraction-free
- To save time, draft template replies for common queries
- If you're not interested in a pitch or project, reply with a friendly but firm one-liner (thereafter, you may disregard further emails)
- Thank people for sending you the information or quotations you requested or for handing over work - an old-school MD I once worked for insists that this is not only polite but shows good breeding, and he's right!
- Once an email has been responded to, file or delete it.

Now, is that so hard?!

ABOUT MARIE ROCHER

Full-stack digital marketer who helps brands and businesses grow
■ Journalism or bust! How to get writing work in tricky times - 3 Jul 2015
■ Give your creativity a much needed nip 'n tuck - 6 Oct 2014
■ Does my bum look big on TV? - 29 Jul 2014
■ Have you hugged your freelancer today? - 8 May 2014

» Why not replying to emails speaks volumes about you - 18 Oct 2013

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>