

## PM WORLD TODAY – PM ADVISORY – JANUARY 2012

## Leveraging Email to Enhance Productivity

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When people hear the word “e-mail” they usually associate it as a means to an end. But what if there was a way to also leverage e-mail into a productivity tool? A study released earlier this year by [Fonality](#)<sup>[1]</sup> and research firm [Webtorials](#)<sup>[2]</sup> shows that we spend a significant amount of time in e-mail. In fact, the study found that an employee spends more than half of his or her day checking or responding to e-mails related to essential but non-productive tasks like scheduling meetings and updating teams on daily tasks.

While it is true that e-mail is a major communication enabler and a driving force in how we communicate in the business setting, shouldn't we also expect it to be able to perform as a productivity tool that can help us become more efficient? Can we be more strategic with the time spent on email, so that it is more useful towards achieving daily successes?

Consider this: what if we had a way for e-mail to act as a central dashboard to manage and complete work each day. To what extent can our inbox serve three main functions: information management, contact management, and work & project management.

### **Information Management**

We tend to use our e-mail inboxes as a digital storage, or repository for files and information. We spend time creating folders, task lists or flags in hopes of managing and prioritizing all this information. Several companies have emerged with [information management platforms](#)<sup>[3]</sup> that serve as an organizational layer that automatically and intelligently prioritizes a user's inbox based on the individual's clicking behavior, group collective intelligence and company business rules. The platform helps deliver relevant and timely e-mails to users in a streamlined fashion. The platform also has the technology to tap into information housed in an enterprise's communication tools – e-mail, instant messenger, contacts and calendar applications – to map out knowledge networks and relationships. An employee can access this system to identify key experts and relationships, and connect with potential customers, partners, vendors, and decision makers.

Additionally, there are tools that act as a digital assistant to distinguish critical e-mails from unimportant e-mails<sup>[4]</sup> so we are not constantly checking inboxes. The digital assistant monitors an e-mail account on behalf of the user, identifies important messages when it arrives, and immediately notifies the user via their preferred

communication platform which can include SMS, Twitter direct message, instant messenger.

### **Contact Management**

An essential part of every e-mail system is managing your contacts effortlessly. Given that the process of entering contacts into an address book is time consuming, there must be a way to save us time. Many businesses are turning to software programs that work with several e-mail applications to integrate them. They also offer the user contextual in addition to contact information. For instance the software automatically notes when the user last contacted that person. It might also show more robust information about that contact including recent Tweets and updates to their LinkedIn profile.

### **Work Management**

While these latest software tools can help organize how we communicate in the business world, ultimately the most effective tool to prevent an over-flooded and unproductive e-mail inbox, is our behavior. It is worth considering some simple strategies in how we relate to our inbox. A simple change like closing your e-mail application so that you are not constantly interrupted with incoming e-mails, while you work on a big project, can make a big difference in your productivity level. Another might be to set specific times during the day to check e-mail. This ensures you can remain focused and attentive to the current project you are working on.

E-mail is not going to disappear just because a new technology or tool is available. Just because we now have television, it does not mean newspapers and magazines no longer exist. Social collaboration tools, data repositories and project management software won't replace email. Rather with the right approach we can leverage these new tools to help us manage our time more efficiently and productively, and bridge the silos of communication and information.

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## About the Author



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**Avinoam Nowogrodski** is co-founder and CEO of Clarizen, the SaaS-based work execution software company. Avinoam Nowogrodski brings over 20 years of experience in sales, engineering and business management to Clarizen. He brings insight and expertise gained in those positions to Clarizen's vision of bringing collaborative project management to every business. Prior to establishing Clarizen, Avinoam co-founded SmarTeam Corporation, a leading provider of collaborative product life cycle management (PLM) solutions. As CEO from 1995 – 2005, Avinoam's leadership molded SmarTeam into a leading enterprise PLM solution which was sold and supported by IBM. In 1999 SmarTeam was acquired by Dassault Systemes (DS) and Avinoam served on the DS General Executive Management team for 6 years. At his departure from the company, SmarTeam had 3,500 customers across diverse industries and over 100,000 users worldwide. Avinoam Nowogrodski holds a BSc in Electrical Engineering from Tel Aviv University, Israel. To contact Mr. Nowogrodski, send email to [zinnia.gill@horngroup.com](mailto:zinnia.gill@horngroup.com).

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