

# E-MAIL

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and if it becomes a distraction, resisting impulsive urges to peek at it throughout the workday.

(A CNN.com article in 2005 included a British study showing that IQs dropped due to constant e-mail checking. "Those who tried to juggle messages and work fell by 10 points – the equivalent to missing a whole night's sleep and more than double the 4-point fall seen after smoking marijuana.")

"What I try not to do is spend all my time looking at e-mails because they'll just suck you in," said Florida Gulf Bank president Bill Valenti, who gets about 50 e-mails per day. "...I very rarely almost never use e-mail for casual conversation. I use it strictly for business. My wife and daughter use e-mail a lot (for personal use), but by the time I get home I'm really not interested."

Valenti said he's also gotten in the habit of checking email on his Blackberry, something he's not overly proud of. Susanna Woods, president of California Closets in Fort Myers, also uses e-mail as a primary communication tool. She responds to about 100 or 150 emails every morning.

"It's the first thing I do everyday."

Woods said that, aside from spam (unwanted or solicitous emails), using e-mail makes her life easier and she would be "lost without it."

But others are taking steps to insure email doesn't overwhelm their lives, or even drive them insane.

"I am very careful to set boundaries about when and how I respond to messages so that I don't have the problem of constantly being on the 'electronic leash' that drives so many people crazy," Cape Coral independent Congressional candidate Jeff George said.

Recording artist Moby might agree. The Washington Post reported in 2007 that the star needed a break: he had sent a message to all his contacts informing them he wouldn't be reading e-mails for the rest of the year.

## Rapid growth

When e-mail burst onto the scene in the mid 1990s nothing else was so attractive. It was the immediate gratification of a telephone call plus the forethought of a letter, delivered at the touch of a button.

Paper letters started to look more antique, but still charming. And in one quick decade, e-mail became a very big deal. Hollywood even explored the fresh face it lent pre-used romantic comedy plotlines, as in "You've Got Mail" with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.

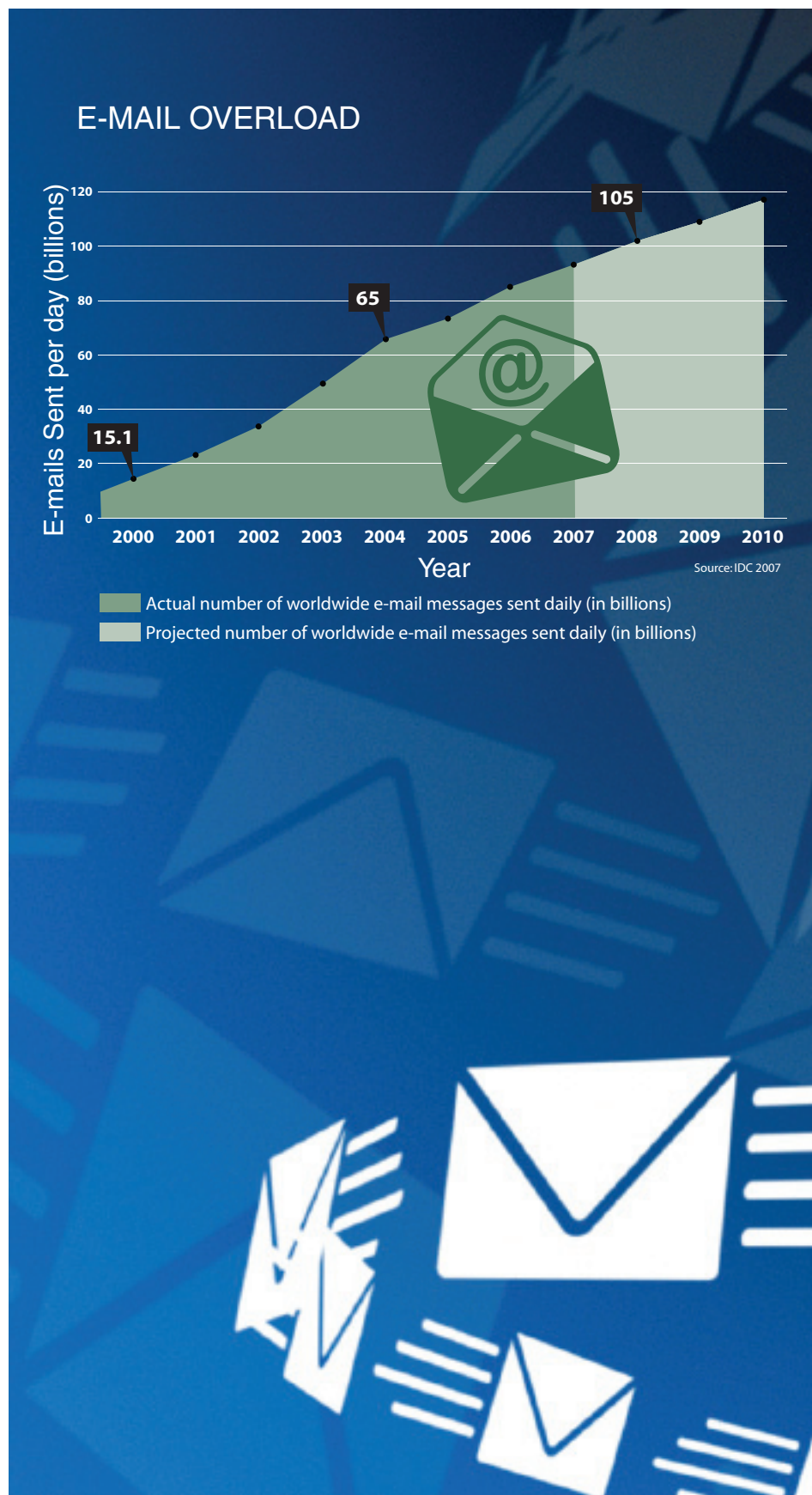
"We are the instant gratification generation," said Dawn Terry, executive assistant of customer and employee relations at Crowther Roofing & Sheet Metal in Fort Myers. Terry, who gets about 100 e-mails per day, started using it only about 5 years ago. "...E-mail has become my main mode of communication even with loved ones. It is just so easy to keep connected all the time with everyone and all at once."

About 15 billion messages raced through cyberspace every day by 2000, says research group IDC, and their popularity continued to intensify dramatically; over 97 billion were sent every day last year.

Since they became popular so quickly, the learning curve for society was steep. Dr. Spellman said.

"Human beings are remarkably adaptive," he said. "We tend to go in a relatively short period of time from automobiles to airplanes, from the pony express to (the United States Postal Service) to e-mail."

"We make the adaptations at the base rather well but we have all sorts of



sophisticated levels of adaptation that have yet to be ironed out."

Wrinkles include spam, e-mail slang and the appropriateness of e-mail emotional content, say a wide variety of businesses and employees Florida Weekly polled.

"About a month ago our software that separates out the spam stopped working," Hall said. "And all of a sudden over the weekend I got like 3,000 emails. At that point I just wanted to go through and delete them all."

The Radicati Group predicts 351 billion spam messages will be sent every day in 2010, but only 190 billion will be delivered because of software which blocks it. Sara Radicati, president and CEO of the Palo Alto, Calif.-based company said in spite of these inconveniences, e-mail is still the grandfather of modern communication.

"If we didn't have e-mails what we'd be doing is far more time consuming and far less economical," she said. "It's one of the best communication tools... it's the oldest and best known in a class of digital communication tools – e-mails, digital networking, instant messaging – those are all digital tools. They're all a million times better than what we had previously."

Or at least faster.

"It's still nice to get a handwritten letter," Woods said.

## E-mail bankruptcy

Hall did not end up deleting all those

e-mails. But others have been noted for their decisions to declare "e-mail bankruptcy," in which overburdened e-mailers purge their inboxes and start fresh. The first may have been internet legal visionary Lawrence Lessig who called it quits in 2002.

Others include prominent tech blogger Vanessa Fox (who worked for 'Google'). She was mentioned in a 2007 USA Today article for declaring "bankruptcy."

"Did the world collapse into a burning inferno of e-mail non-response?" Fox asked on her blog. "Did (e-mail) bankruptcy hurt my e-mail credit score and force me into one of those high-interest e-mail loan programs you see infomercials for on late-night TV? Have those whose e-mails I jettisoned started a Facebook group called 'those who were shunned by Vanessa's email bankruptcy and are plotting revenge?'"

"Amazingly enough, life has gone on."

## Life after e-mail

Dr. Spellman also noted, lest we forget to speak for all the typing, that in some cases e-mail shouldn't be used at all. (His interview was conducted over the phone, although most of those quoted in this article responded to questions via e-mail).

"There's some communications that have an emotional load that demand face to face," he said.

For example, it could be unwise to

## TIPS FOR MANAGING E-MAIL

- Reply to mail right away if possible, especially if you deal with large volumes of mail. If you don't, you might get swamped by it.
- Pick and choose. Based on the subject line, it's often easy to discern which e-mails you have to answer, which aren't so pressing and the ones that are not for you.
- Be discriminating about whom you give your address to. Only friends, family and active business associates should get your main email address.
- Set up separate e-mail accounts. (Although many say having too many e-mail addresses can cause e-mail bankruptcy). One blogger said he had an "events@" e-mail address used only for concert notifications and art gallery openings.
- Focus is key. To maintain it, avoid checking e-mail every five minutes, on your Blackberry in traffic or waking in the night to check it.
- Send fewer e-mails. If you send 20 percent less, chances are you'll get 20 percent less.
- Walk away, if necessary. Some say e-mail bankruptcy, or deleting all your unread messages, was the only way to catch up. Make yourself available in other ways, by phone or in person.
- Don't lose too much sleep over not responding to every e-mail. People who want to find you will. "Let's face it," one blogger wrote. "People aren't sitting around waiting for your reply."
- Don't be a pack-rat. (Unless you really, really want to keep all those e-mails). Delete e-mail that, for example, offers valuable business opportunities in China.

propose marriage in an e-mail, if for no other reason than because it's always possible the message would go unread.

"(E-mail) allows some people to hide behind the idea of lost communication," said Zach Katkin, director of operations for Atilus in Fort Myers, a web design and internet marketing company. "You don't generally know if someone really received an e-mail, or really read it. If there is a big message that needs to go out, or something sensitive that needs to be discussed I would recommend combining more conventional communication with an email."

Apparently, those with insensitive messages to deliver would agree, according to News-Press president and publisher Carol Hudler who manages 140-200 e-mails per day.

"My most obnoxious, personal insults still arrive by the United States Postal Service," she said. "They usually have something enclosed, like a tear sheet of a cartoon they didn't like, or a collection of our 'post-it' ads we put on the front of the paper."

"I hate (e-mail)," she added. "But I need it. And it beats phone tag. Those with fiery tempers also need to let a draft e-mail sit to be re-read before pushing send."

That's a lesson theater-owner Will Prather, who gets about 1,000 e-mails per week (90 percent of them work related), learned the hard way.

"I once sent a rude and hateful e-mail to a critic who panned one of my shows and ridiculed dinner theatre," he said. "Needless to say, they no longer review my theatre and it wasn't the best thing to do for business."

Candidate Jeff George agreed, pointing out that he was once fired from a job because of an e-mail he sent on a company account, as part of an intellectual discussion, in which he made "absurd, hyperbolic claims for the sake of argument, and mentioned past drug use."

He won't make that mistake again; nor will he feel the need to respond to every e-mail post haste.

"There's a general message I make clear to everyone," he said. "Just because you can reach me instantly doesn't mean I'm obligated to reply instantly. This is, after all, Florida." ■