

Want to stay connected? Some best practices



By Phil Sasso
Contributing Editor

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Q. Email is overwhelming me. I've got enough to do servicing customers and managing my business without juggling all this email. Any advice?

A. You're not alone. I feel email overload too. The other day I counted 207 emails in my mailbox – in one hour. A lot were unimportant or junk, but sorting them was a pain. (So, the following advice is for me as much as you!)

Technology can make our lives easier or harder. It's all in how we use it. Here are some tips for taming the electronic mail dragon:

 **Cornwell Tools Northeast-PA NJ NY**
January 28

Dealer Matt N helps his customers with some storage needs the past few days....looks like a cart finds a home at 5 star with Jeremiah and the 75 with generator ends up at Dickinson Fleet with Corey...thank you!



A dealer finds it helpful to spread the good news on Facebook when a customer buys a toolbox.

Divide and conquer. "I strongly suggest that you have separate business and personal email addresses," says Don Russell, Cornwell Tools' digital marketing manager. You don't want to deal with a crazy chainmail from your Aunt Gertrude when you're on the clock. This lets you push off personal email until the workday is over.

Check your email often. Check your business email several times a day, says Russell. He suggests at the beginning of your day, midday (if you take a break) and at the end of your day. It's quicker and easier to deal with fewer emails at one time.

"I can't emphasize enough the importance of checking your email regularly," says Russell. He says tool dealers often call him about missing a last-minute promotion simply because they didn't check their email for several days. You also don't want to miss a customer's order or urgent question.

Russell tells a story about an OEM recall that required a special adapter to fix. Cornwell dealers who read his email blast about the recall and adapter were able to get orders from their customers before competing dealers even knew about the opportunity.

Can the spam. The spam filter is the greatest invention since the TV remote. Use it!

Use filters. Most email applications allow you to create filters to sort your email into separate folders. The simplest, for example, would drop every email from your flag into one folder so you check it more often, says Russell. That's also faster than scanning your entire email box to find a new clearance promotion you got yesterday.

You can create sophisticated filter scripts, too. For example, you can have a filter drop emails with



 **Alex Griss**

Mobile Uploads · Yesterday at 7:53pm

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Customers are oftentimes flattered when a distributor posts their picture with a favorite toolbox on Facebook.

invoice attachments into a "bill" folder or emails with marketing information into a "promotions" folder. Don't want to deal with this? Ask a "techie" friend or young person for help. (My "go to" IT guys are a friend who works at IBM and my 14-year-old son.)

Russell says Thunderbird (www.mozilla.org/thunderbird) is a solid, free email application that has a lot of nice features and filtering tools. It's by Mozilla, the same folks who make the Firefox browser (www.mozilla.org). Try it.

Salute the flag. Want to put off, but not forget an email? Flag it. Just be sure you review your flagged email often or it's as good as forgotten.

Q. A customer called me with an order when I was driving. I couldn't write it down and I forgot it. What can I do to avoid that happening again?

A. I think vitamin B-12 is good for memory loss – or maybe that's for fatigue. I forget.

Seriously, it's not your memory, it's that you need to encourage customers to text or email you with orders or questions. If you prefer talking to customers, let their calls go to voicemail. In your greeting, ask customers to leave their order or question so you can get back to them with

an answer. (Russell does this.) That way, you can avoid interruptions and deal with texts, emails and voicemails more efficiently by tackling them all at once.

Remind your customer that anytime they need something they can call, email or text you. Remember your goal is to use technology to make their life easier as well as yours.

Q. A lot of my customers are showing up on Facebook. Should I friend them?

A. No! At least not on your personal Facebook account. Customers don't need to see the annoying cat pictures your cousin Millie posted on your wall. And your friends and family may start to avoid you if you start posting tool promotions on your personal page.

(Remember Russell's advice about keeping your business and personal life separate? That goes double here.). Set up a business Facebook account.

"I think Facebook is the best way for dealers to get in contact with their customers en masse," says Russell. "They only have to post it one place. It's very easy for dealers to get customers to follow them ... and personal and business accounts are both attached to the same login ID and use all the same tools."

Setting up and managing a business Facebook page is easy, says Russell. (Cornwell has a one-page handout on setting up a business Facebook page. Ask your flag for theirs.)

"Take a photo of a guy standing next to the toolbox you just delivered to him with a big, proud smile on his face and post it on Facebook," says Russell. There

are other customers just like him who could see themselves with a new toolbox – or who want to buy his old toolbox. And there are smartphone apps that will let you shoot and post photos in seconds. So it's worth the few moments to post photos every time you sell any big ticket item.

To do this with email, you'd have the headache of gathering addresses, maintaining the list, and putting together the email, says Russell. With Facebook, it's simple to put several posts a week on Facebook in literally a few minutes.

How do you get followers? Just post a sign on the truck telling customers to find you on Facebook. If you can, print it on your receipts or business cards. You have the toys. They'll want to follow you to see what's new and exciting.

Now if you'll excuse me, I need to check my reader email folder. ■

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