



How you can avoid emails that byte back

Brian Thomas

EMAIL has become so pervasive that most of us could scarcely imagine life in the office without it.

Now devices such as BlackBerry and Palm Pilot are making it even easier to send and receive email from trains, buses and restaurants as well as the office.

Too easy, according to Sydneysider Sharon MacNevin, who has developed a thriving business teaching companies how to turn the email tide — or at least cut the losses in time and productivity.

Email has developed so rapidly that many organisations and individuals have forgotten the business guidelines for written communication and sending, receiving and filing mail, Mrs MacNevin said.

The solution was to attack the problem at the source — the employee — and her company's training programs focus on the slogan "Ready, Aim, Fire".

Here are some ways to control the email environment:

1 We have come to expect an immediate response to emails and even send follow-up messages. Before email, it was understood that it was best to take time to respond to a request.

2 Don't assume people are working just for you. Define the time frame in the subject header and body text. Convey urgency by

using the telephone or face-to-face communication. Don't presume your recipient is sitting at the desk.

3 Resist using read receipts because they are often seen as offensive. Don't send multiple emails because it can seem like nagging.

4 Resist the urge to check your inbox constantly. Set aside three or four times a day to send and receive email.

5 Email is not a substitute for direct interaction.

6 The faster email is exchanged, the less time we have for interpreting it, which can lead to misinterpretation.

7 Consider the consequences when email is confidential or private.

8 Don't be a compulsive CC (courtesy copy) user. Such email is probably the greatest waster of corporate time.

9 Reply only to the sender of an email if you are among a group of recipients.

10 Receiving an email does not automatically give you the right to send it on.

11 Use links rather than attachments to save on megabytes.

12 Email is a representation of a business and should be structured like a memo.

Sharon MacNevin will address the Institute of Chartered Accountants business forum on Email Management, Working Smarter not Harder, in Brisbane on Tuesday.