

IDEAS

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THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

SIMPLIFYING PRODUCTIVITY

In the last 10 years as technology has evolved, I've been able to place several dynamic tools in the hands of our staff to create a more empowered, productive and efficient work environment. It's provided tremendous advantages for our customers and employees, and the nice part about these tools is the price. Most are either free or cost very little, but the return is exponential to the functions served.

USE EMAIL FEATURES. We all use email, but do we use it to its fullest potential? For many reasons, everyone on your staff needs a company email address, including teachers. While there are many email options, we use Gmail (along with a billion other people). Incorporate the right apps and functions and your email could become a more dynamic resource and one of your most powerful tools. We customize our email with built-in features and free apps — making our email a bulked-up powerhouse.

You can customize Gmail by selecting a few built-in add-ons right in the “Settings” menu. Using the tabs across the top of the settings page you can then activate many of these features. Several of our staff favorites are



Work smarter, not harder with time-saving functions

the “Canned Responses” found under the “Lab’s” tab in settings and the ability to undo sent emails under the “General” tab.

One great feature that I often use is the ability to send and archive messages. Just yesterday, I was discussing a lesson makeup issue with a customer when she said to me, “No one ever told me about the makeup policy,” but when I pulled up an archived email conversation with that customer, I found that

I had indeed had the same conversation via email with that client only a month ago. Hard to dispute that written account of our conversation.

Be sure to check out Boomerang and Yesware for Gmail. Boomerang, among other things, lets you schedule emails to be sent in your absence and set reminders. Yesware offers the first artificial intelligence email feature that I'm aware of that indicates how likely your email will be to receive a response from the recipient. It also has a great email tracking tool so you know if your email was received and read.

HOST VIRTUAL MEETINGS. The economist Thomas Sowell has been quoted as saying, “The least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings.” I wish the word “meeting” never existed. It's an inevitable task but it does not have to be unproductive.

Using Zoom allows my staff and I to hold very productive meetings online. Every Thursday morning at 10 a.m. we meet for an hour; being online allows our staff to login from anywhere in the world to participate in the meetings. Employees are paid for the time that they are

online, so we usually see 100 percent attendance.

I start each meeting with a wrap up of the week and what's to come over the weekend before turning it over to new business. Allow plenty of time for those in the meeting to have the floor. It's become invaluable to our employee's productivity, creativity and the open sharing of ideas.

We really enjoy the cloud-based recording feature that lets employees who can't be online for the live meeting follow a link and watch when they are able to do so. Webinars, the ability to meet and manage meetings for large groups of people, and adding administrators are all great features of Zoom as well.

As we enter a new year, I encourage you to put similar functions in place over the first quarter of 2018 and explore how your operation can benefit from introducing time-saving functions into your daily workplaces.

The right tools allow us the ability to work smarter, not harder. **MI**

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