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## Quick and Easy IT Productivity Wins

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By Dan Tynan

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Big tech projects can provide huge long-term payoffs in IT efficiency, but sometimes it's the little things that have the biggest impact on productivity. After all, it's often those details -- meetings, email, menial tasks -- that keep you from tackling the important issues right away.

We talked to several tech pros and came up with eight quick ways to boost IT productivity without [investing tens of thousands of dollars](#) or six months of resources.

Some you can implement right now. Others may take time, but rest assured, each will pay off handsomely in the long run -- so what are you waiting for?

### IT productivity win No. 1: Break the meeting habit

According to recent surveys, IT staff spend nearly six hours a week in meetings that more than 70 percent say is time wasted. It's little wonder then that for many organizations "meeting" is a four-letter word.

Of course, face-to-face sit-downs can't always be avoided, but you can minimize their productivity drain by changing your [meeting habits](#).

Meetings are about making decisions, not about sitting around waiting for everyone to say their piece. The quicker you reach consensus, the faster you can get back to doing real work.

Step No. 1: Remove all chairs from meeting rooms, suggests Patrick Srail, director of product management at News Corp./Myspace. Being forced to think on your feet will bring meetings to a head much more quickly.

Srail's other secrets? "Cancel all meetings that don't have an agenda, and repeat all action items at the end of each meeting," he says. "Meetings without action items are basically status updates, and those don't need to be in the form of meetings."

Instead of convening in a conference room, get status updates via email or chat, run slide presentations and product demos remotely using services like GoToMeeting or WebEx so people can view them without leaving their desks, and replace some in-person face time with video chat. That will save the time you waste schlepping to the conference room and waiting for laggards to roll in.

"Visual information communicates so much more than voice-only, your meetings will move more fluidly," adds Aaron Charles Sylvan, president of Sylvan Social Technology, which helps small businesses develop viral websites. "Also, since it compels both parties to pay attention, calls are brief and to the point -- instead of one person rambling while the other starts checking their email."

Another, seemingly paradoxical, way to reduce the number of pointless meetings is to increase the availability of places to meet, advises Rick Brenner, principal of Chaco Canyon Consulting.

"One of the drivers of periodic team meetings is the need to reserve conference rooms well in advance," he says. "Some teams meet even when there is little real need to meet, just because 'Tuesday at 10 is our regular meeting.' Having plenty of conference rooms eliminates the need to have meetings unless they're justified by the situation."

### IT productivity win No. 2: Kill your email

Remember when [email](#) and IM were a productivity godsend? Fire off a question and get back to work while somebody else fetched the information you needed.

Those days are over, thanks to the deluge. According to the Radicati Group, the volume of email, IM, and [spam is increasing](#) by 20 to 25 percent per year. Managing all those messages is getting in the way of real work.

Rule No. 1: Turn off alerts for new messages so they don't distract you, says Stever Robbins, productivity expert and author of ["9 Steps to Work Less and Do More."](#) In other words, check your messages when you want them, not when they want you. Second, close your email and IM clients periodically throughout the day, and let everyone know you're off the electronic leash during those hours.

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