

Multitasking Makes You Less Productive, Says Science

With Thanksgiving in the rear-view mirror, we are now firmly in the throes of the holiday season and the end of the year. Both promise to test your ability to get through your to-do list and prioritize. Adding to that stress, most legal marketing departments are chronically understaffed and working to do more with fewer people. The answer to surviving this time is often multitasking. But does it really work?



Jaffe Staff

According to [David Ackert](#), who provided a great discussion on "Time Management Strategies for the Overwhelmed Marketer" at the [LMA Southwest Region Conference](#), the answer is *no!* Ackert says that multitasking makes you 20 percent less productive and more prone to errors. Meanwhile, a study by the [American Psychological Association](#) says the productive loss may be closer to 40 percent. Does that get your attention?

Think about it: You are working on a document; your email notification pops up and you look at it. Then the phone rings and a partner has a question. Now you go back to your document, but where were you? The problem is that changing tasks means you have to give your brain time to refocus. That refocusing eats up time whenever you change tasks. In fact, a recent article in [Psychology Today](#) suggests that multitasking is not just unproductive, it can actually be harmful, citing such effects as memory loss and bone-breaking falls.

How to Avoid Multitasking at Work

Next time you are tempted to multitask, make a conscious choice and unitask. Here are a few tips to make time management easier.

- Make a list of priorities for the day so you can be proactive, instead of reactive.
- Block off a period on your calendar each day for uninterrupted work time. During this time, don't answer emails, and let your phone go to voicemail. It doesn't have to be hours; try 30 minutes to start.
- Ideally, schedule your work time at the same time each day so colleagues know this is the time you should not be interrupted. But think about it reasonably. Don't schedule this time during the busiest parts of the day; you still need and want to be accessible to colleagues when they need you most.
- If your office has a door, close it for brief periods each day. If you don't have a door, get yourself a pair of noise-cancelling headphones. Just don't use either approach too often, or you will be seen as standoffish and unapproachable.
- Try to position yourself at your desk so you are not looking out at lanes of traffic, be it a door, hallway, etc. These sights will distract you and cause you to lose focus.
- Close all the unnecessary windows on your computer.
- Keep your desk clear of clutter. A desk with too much on it calls your attention in the

wrong direction, rather than letting you focus on the single task you are focusing on.

- Prioritize!

As you work to juggle the end of the year and holiday crunch, try focusing on one thing at a time. Need help? Contact Vivian Hood @ vhood@jaffepr.com.