

## Survey: Is it OK to check email during meetings? (April 19)

### Menlo Park, Calif. — April 19

Is it OK to check e-mail during meetings? A new survey shows the verdict is still out, although many executives are doing it.

Eighty-six percent of senior executives polled said it is common for professionals they work with to read and respond to e-mail messages during meetings.

Close to one-third of this group (31 percent), however, disapproves of the practice.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents feel it's OK to respond to e-mail as long as the message is urgent, and 23 percent of those polled said professionals should excuse themselves from the meeting before responding to e-mail.

The survey was developed by Robert Half Management Resources, a provider of senior-level accounting and finance professionals on a project and interim basis.

The national poll includes responses from 150 senior executives — including those from human resources, finance and marketing departments — with the nation's 1,000 largest companies.

Senior executives were asked, "In your experience, how common is it for professionals you work with to read and respond to e-mail messages on their mobile devices (i.e., BlackBerry, Treo) during business meetings?"

Their responses:

- Very common: 53 percent
- Somewhat common: 33 percent
- Somewhat uncommon: 9 percent
- Very uncommon: 5 percent

Respondents were then asked, "Which of the following most closely describes your reaction when professionals read and respond to e-mail during business meetings?"

Their responses:

- It's OK to read and respond to messages during the meeting, but only if the message is urgent: 37 percent
- It's never OK — e-mail devices should be turned off or not brought to the meeting at all: 31 percent
- It's OK to check messages as long as attendees excuse themselves and step outside the meeting to respond: 23 percent
- It's perfectly acceptable to read and respond to messages during the meeting, especially at a time when what is being said doesn't pertain to them: 9 percent

"The least-disruptive option is to avoid using handheld e-mail devices during meetings, but that may not always be possible for executives who must be accessible," said Paul McDonald, Robert Half Management Resources executive director. "Professionals who may have to check e-mail during gatherings should alert their hosts and be as unobtrusive as possible."

Robert Half Management Resources offers these additional tips for using mobile devices during meetings:

- **Be discreet.** If you need to bring your mobile device to a meeting, set it on vibrate to avoid disturbing other attendees or the meeting leader.
- **Consider your audience.** Your co-workers might be more forgiving of your need to respond to e-mail than a client, for example, so adjust your e-mail activity accordingly.
- **Respond only if it's truly urgent.** It's tempting to check every message that comes in, but avoid doing so unless there's a compelling reason.
- **Step out of the room.** If you receive an urgent message during a meeting, step quietly out of the room to reply.
- **Know when to let go.** Spending a considerable amount of time checking e-mail will make those you are with feel unimportant. It's better to bow out of a meeting altogether than be distracted during most of it.