



• A SHORT BRIEF FOR FOUNDERS AND AGENCY OWNERS

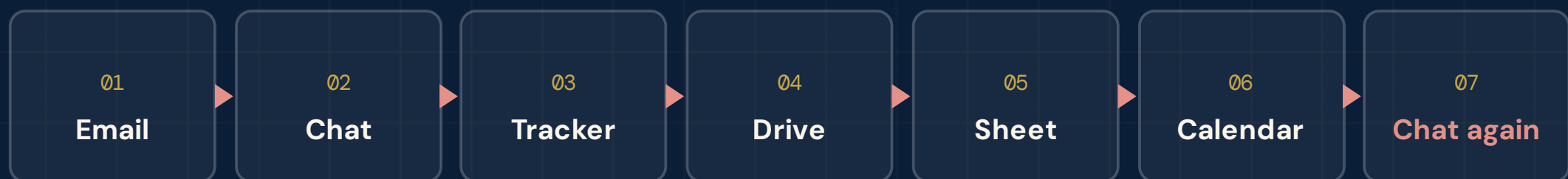
The Switching Gap

Your team is not slow. They are being interrupted roughly 1,200 times a day by the tools you bought to make them faster.

ONE TASK: TELL A CLIENT THEIR DEADLINE MOVED

Not a complicated request. Here is every place someone has to visit to finish it.

Where it starts



Seven stops. Six switches. And that was one task, done once, by one person.

Multiply by every task, every person, every day.

Around 1,200 switches a day each, and four hours a week purely re-orienting.

The same task, once the work is wired together:

One update. Everything else notified, logged and scheduled without a human hop.

That wiring is the job. It is not a tool purchase, it is a design decision.

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Five working weeks a year, per person, **re-orienting**.

This is the rare study in this field that observed real work rather than surveying people about it, which is why the number is both smaller and more believable than the ones you usually see.

1,200

toggles between apps and websites, per person, per day

HBR / Soroco, Aug 2022

~4 hrs

a week spent re-orienting after those switches

HBR / Soroco

9%

of the working year, which is about five working weeks

HBR / Soroco

THE METHOD

Observed, not self-reported

Published in Harvard Business Review by researchers from Soroco with academic and enterprise co-authors. 137 users across 20 teams at three large firms, tracked for up to five weeks. Small sample, but it watched what people did rather than asking them to estimate.

SUPPORTING

About 59 minutes a day searching for information across apps

Qatalog with Cornell University's Ellis Idea Lab, from surveys of roughly a thousand remote knowledge workers. Survey-based and vendor-commissioned, so treat it as corroboration rather than proof.

DO THE MULTIPLICATION

Five weeks per person. On a team of eight, that is roughly forty weeks of paid work a year that produced nothing, and it will never appear on a timesheet.

The switch costs a second. The **landing** costs minutes.

Nobody loses a working week clicking. They lose it re-establishing what they were doing, where they were up to, and what they had already decided.

What owners think is happening

People are distracted. They need more discipline, better focus habits, fewer notifications. Framed as a personal failing, it becomes a coaching problem and nothing changes.

What is actually happening

The work itself is spread across tools that do not talk to each other, so finishing a single task requires visiting several of them. The switching is not a lapse. It is the job as currently designed.

REORIENTATION

Roughly nine and a half minutes to regain the workflow after a switch

Qatalog with Cornell. Survey-based, so directional. But it explains why 1,200 one-second switches turn into four lost hours a week.

COMPOUNDING

The tax is invisible because it is never one big block

It arrives in fragments too small to notice and too small to log. Nobody can point to the hour they lost, which is exactly why it survives every productivity push.

CONSEQUENCE

Deep work becomes the first casualty

Shallow tasks survive fragmentation. Thinking does not. The work that most needs an uninterrupted hour is the work least likely to get one.

THE REFRAME THAT MATTERS

HBR's own conclusion is that this is a management design choice, not an inevitable cost of digital work. You cannot hire your way out of it. Adding people to a fragmented process adds fragments.

Two numbers you will see everywhere that I will not use.

Most statistics in this field are published by companies selling the tool that fixes the problem they are measuring. Here is what I checked and what I discarded.

"Context switching costs up to 40 percent of productive time"

Usually attributed to the American Psychological Association. It traces back to older general research on multitasking, not to any study of knowledge workers switching applications. The number is doing work its source never did.

"It takes 23 minutes to refocus after an interruption"

This one is real, from Gloria Mark's research at UC Irvine. But it concerns interruptions broadly, not app switching, and it gets conflated with the nine-and-a-half-minute figure constantly. Two different things, two different studies.

WHAT I KEPT

The HBR and Soroco observational study, with its sample stated

137 users, 20 teams, three firms, up to five weeks. I quote the sample every time, because a number without a method is an advertisement.

WHAT I LABELLED

Everything published by a workplace software vendor

Asana, Qatalog and similar produce useful directional data and they also sell the remedy. That does not make them wrong. It makes them worth naming.

WHY I BOTHER

You are going to make a decision partly on the strength of these figures. A brief that quotes a number it cannot trace is a brief you should not act on.

Nobody bought a tool intending to **fragment the work.**

Every application in your business was bought to solve something real. The fragmentation is what happens between them, and nobody owns the between.

SOURCE 01

The same fact lives in four places

A deadline exists in the tracker, the calendar, an email thread and someone's message. Changing it means visiting all four, so people check all four, so nobody trusts any of them.

SOURCE 02

Status has to be assembled

Answering "where are we" requires opening things. When the answer is not generated, it is gathered, and gathering is switching.

SOURCE 03

Requests arrive anywhere

Chat, email, a comment, a passing message. Without a single intake point, every channel must be monitored, which means every channel must be checked.

THE PATTERN

Each of these is a missing connection, not a missing tool

The instinct is to buy something that unifies everything. That usually adds an eighth destination rather than removing six.

THE TEST

Follow one ordinary task and count the stops

Take something small that happens weekly. Write down every application someone opens to complete it. Most teams are surprised at four, and the real answer is usually six or seven.

SAID PLAINLY

You do not have a tool problem. You have an unwired problem, and the wiring was never anybody's job.

Fewer destinations, not a better dashboard.

The goal is not to make switching pleasant. It is to remove the reasons anyone has to look somewhere else in the first place.

MOVE 01

Make status arrive, not be fetched

Blocked, overdue and due-today delivered to each person before work starts, in the place they already are. Nobody opens a tracker to find out where they stand, which removes a daily round of switches for every person on the team.

MOVE 02

One intake point, wired to the work

Requests enter through one route and become a tracked item with an owner automatically. This kills the "check every channel" habit, which is where a large share of the switching lives.

MOVE 03

One update, everything else follows

Change the date once and the notification, the log and the schedule update themselves. This is the single highest-value connection in most small businesses, and it is usually a few hours of work.

// Consolidating tools is the obvious answer and usually the wrong one. Ripping out an application your team likes is expensive, slow, and does not address why the work was scattered.

Connect first. Consolidate later, and only where the connection proved the tool was redundant.

THE MEASURE

Count the stops on one ordinary task before and after. That number is the only honest scoreboard here, and it is one anybody on the team can verify.

I have removed these stops.

Built and maintained by me in a live agency, supporting senior leadership across many concurrent client accounts.

ARRIVES

Status nobody fetches

Daily stand-up sent to each person as a direct message before work starts, showing their blocked, in progress, overdue and due today. Removed the daily round of checking, and the meeting that used to produce it.

ENTERS ONCE

Intake wired to tickets

Request forms flowing straight through to tracked items with owners attached, so requests stop arriving across four channels and stop being lost in one.

FOLLOWS ON

One change, many updates

Whole engagements scaffolded in one click. Recurring work generated ahead of time. Overdue items escalated to the person who can act, in the channel they already use.

SCALE

40+ automation rules, 9 scripted jobs, 8 integrations

Across Jira, Tempo, ScriptRunner and Google Workspace, connecting tools that did not previously talk to each other. Two paid automation subscriptions retired and replaced with scripts the team could read and change.

REPORTING

Weekly utilization and burn generated rather than assembled

Per client, against contracted hours, delivered on a schedule. Nobody opened four systems to produce it.

CREDENTIALS

Google Project Management Professional Certificate and Google AI Essentials

Plus Anthropic AI Fluency and Model Context Protocol. 31 certifications in total, every one independently verifiable.

// Paul is dependable, highly organized, and always willing to step in wherever support is needed. His attention to detail, problem-solving skills, and commitment to keeping operations running smoothly made him an invaluable part of the team.

Mary Joy Bertulfo · Executive Assistant · Worked together 2+ years

Count the stops on one ordinary task.

You do not need a tool audit or a consultant. You need one task, followed honestly, with every application written down. It takes an afternoon and it usually ends an argument.

OPTION 01

Do the count yourself

Pick something that happens weekly. Have whoever does it list every place they open, in order. Six or seven is normal. Anything above four is a wiring problem, not a discipline problem.

OPTION 02

Give me the worst one

Send me the task with the most stops. I will come back with which connections would remove the most switches and roughly what each would take to build.

OPTION 03

Start with status

If you only do one thing, make status arrive instead of being fetched. It is usually the single biggest reduction available and it needs no new software.

WHAT I WOULD EXPECT YOU TO FIND

One task with more stops than anyone guessed. At least one application opened only to check something that could have been sent. And a status meeting that exists because the information does not travel on its own.

Available now for remote work

Chief of Staff · Operations · Senior Executive Assistant · Project Manager
Send me your task and its stops, and I will tell you which connection I would build first.

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Sources: Murty, Das and Dadlani, "How Much Time and Energy Do We Waste Toggling Between Applications?", Harvard Business Review, August 2022, research conducted with Soroco; 137 users across 20 teams at three firms, observed for up to five weeks. Qatalog with Cornell University Ellis Idea Lab, Workgeist Report 2021, survey of approximately 1,000 remote knowledge workers per wave. Asana Anatomy of Work Index, fielded by Sapio Research. Deliberately excluded: the widely repeated claim that context switching costs up to 40 percent of productive time, which cannot be traced to a study of application switching. Figures are third-party research, not results I am claiming.