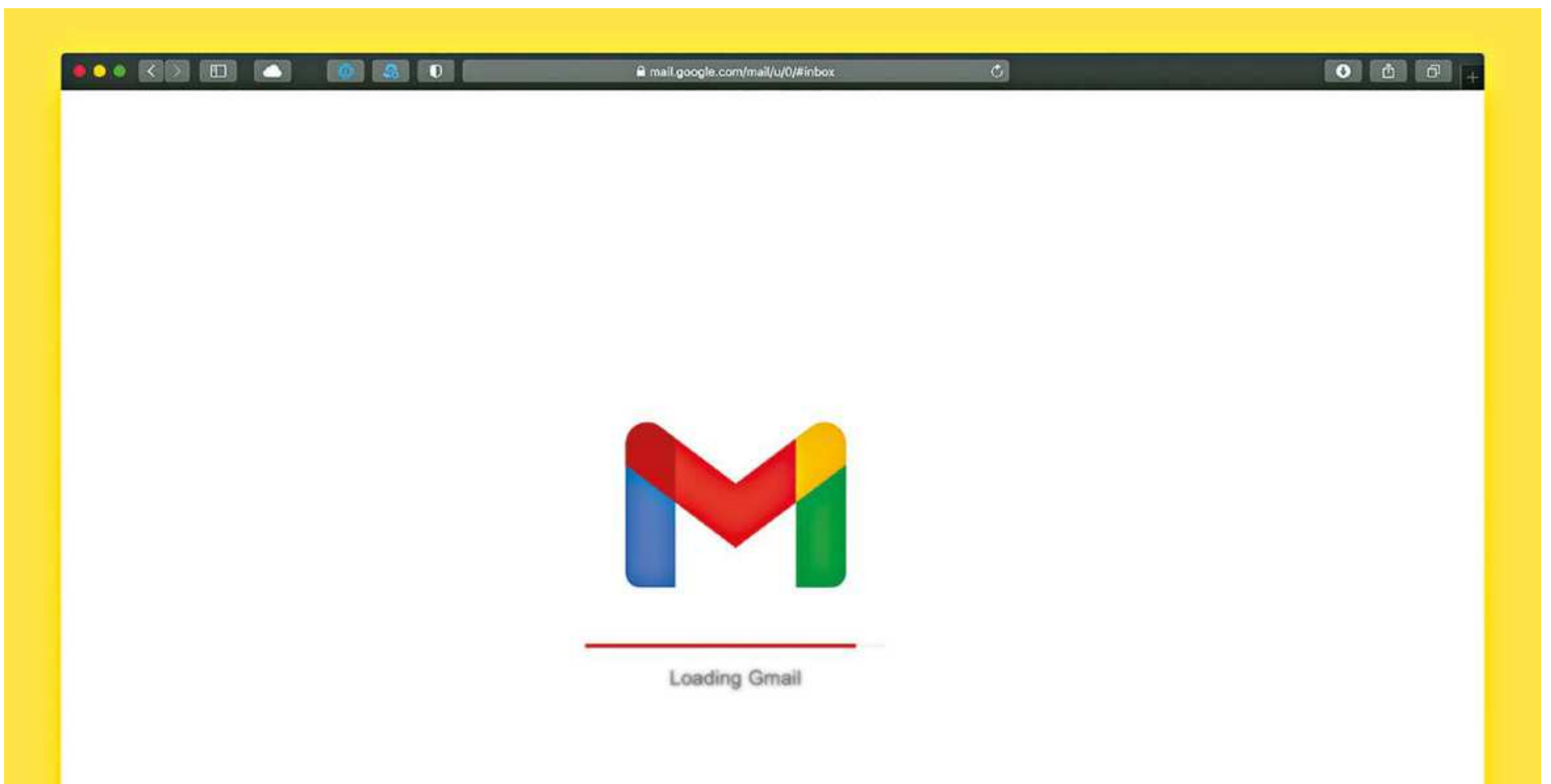


Reducing digital carbon footprint

Why the world needs you to pay attention to your inbox

VERONICA GOMES



While people all around the globe are actively adopting sustainable and environment-friendly alternatives, monitoring carbon footprints has become more crucial than ever. Thus arises a question- are there sources of carbon emissions around us that we can easily control but are unaware of?

While managing our flight times, driving the right kind of environment-friendly cars and using the most sustainable products is on the rise, a relatively unexplored source of carbon emissions that demands our immediate attention is emails. According to the research on digital carbon footprints conducted by Lancaster University (UK), the average carbon dioxide emission of a single email amounts to 4 grams. If the email contains pictures or files attached to it, the number rises to 50 grams. In the case of spams, they create less than 0.5 grams of emissions and are often automatically deleted and thus are less concerning. These are measured according to the amount of electricity used to facilitate its transfer, whereby the larger the size of the email, the greater the carbon emission.

Although the impact of individual emails on climate change remains negligible, its user base of around 4.1 billion people makes the cumulative impact alarming. The impact continues

to increase as people keep upgrading to bigger phones with more advanced specs. A report by BBC states that emails transmitted around the world account for emitting carbon dioxide equivalent to 7 million cars per year.

As the global contributor is slowly gaining the traction it deserves, organizations are already stepping up and paying attention to their emails. Some examples of big corporations taking initiatives to decrease the deteriorating impact of emails are the Huffington Post CEO, whose organization developed an in-house software that automatically deletes emails to employees who are away, where the senders can resend the email later if need be. Furthermore, LinkedIn's CEO makes it a rule to limit the number of emails he sends and receives, only making them permissible when truly necessary.

If you're still wondering why this is important, it is to be noted that the process of reducing the emissions caused by emails is simple, requires zero cost and can be done by anyone, anywhere. On the bonus side, it allows you to alleviate your mental health, as the stress of an unnecessarily clogged up inbox is also lowered. Thus the following is a list of suggestions that can guide you to start being more accountable for your digital carbon footprint.

DECLUTTER

Much like your room which needs that one day-long cleaning spree, your inbox needs the same. Start by unsubscribing from the countless newsletters you never read but never got around getting rid of. Unlink your email from websites that constantly send you updates that you would prefer not to receive. Make it a daily practice to delete unnecessary emails from your inbox and keep only the important ones that you'll require in the future.

ALTERNATIVES

Before drafting an email, consider whether you can resolve this issue using another medium. If it can be done face-to-face or through SMS, do so. Sometimes issues can wait, and if there is already a scheduled meeting with your to-be email recipient, consider waiting till the time arrives instead of sending an unnecessary email. This not only decreases an additional 4 to 50 gram of CO₂ emission but further allows the recipient to avoid being clogged up with yet another redundant email.

HYPERLINKS

While attaching photos or files to emails multiplies its carbon emission to 50g, the same information can be conveyed by using hyperlinks instead of attaching the actual file in question. Use google

drive links or other cloud services to transfer your data. It not only proves to be more environmentally friendly but also provides the recipient with a more convenient form of data storage.

REVIEW

Before sending out an email, make sure to proofread sufficiently. Make sure all the information is provided in the email itself and that the message you are trying to convey is successfully communicated through your email. Eliminate the need for further follow-up emails by making sure the first email is sufficient.

RECIPIENT

Make sure the people you send the email to are the ones actually in need of it and benefit from it. Emails with multiple recipients and people on CC often contain unnecessary personnel who probably don't need to see the email. Be selective regarding who your recipients are and reduce carbon emissions accordingly.

All in all, it doesn't always require big revolutionary acts to change the world. Rather it is important to seek out how and where you can make an impact, be it small, daily and spread the word to start the next big change cumulatively. While saving the world remains number one on the agenda, let's start small- one email at a time.