

Email: a landfill where nothing goes away!

Corporate email systems have become an electronic landfill of information replacing the lateral file. Why? As the cost of storage continues to go down and storage allocations are increased by the IT Department, more stuff is squirreled away into digital darkness never to be seen again. More importantly, as part of the budget process, email system growth has a budgeted line item because nothing, or at least very little, is ever deleted!

On the flip side, instructing an employee, department head, or executive to clean out their email is like trying to tell your High School son or daughter to clean their room. The response is a loud complaint accompanied by numerous reasons why they should not do what we ask. Then comes the whining followed by minimal compliance. Sound like an executive you know?

On the surface, you think things look clean, only to realize that alternative storage locations such as word files on the server, local hard drives, or thumb drives have become the space formerly referred to as "under the bed." The most egregious violation would be to forward your email to a subordinate asking them to hold onto it. This is paramount to putting everything in the dirty laundry and dealing with it later.

As funny as the metaphor seems, the correlation is accurate. We keep everything and complain that we can't find it anything. We waste time looking for it in our mailbox only to call someone to see if they have a copy of it because we don't know how to use the search function or we're just too "busy" to learn. Okay, enough of the rant….

Here are some simple rules to apply to your corporate email system mailbox, but first and foremost, you must be disciplined.

Company email is:

1. For communication not venting. Only put in writing what you want somebody else to read.
2. For the secure transportation of needed information
3. Not an electronic bulletin board or Post-It-Note system (tag you're it!)
4. Not a CYA mailbox filing system
5. Not a casual medium. It can be used in legal matters, be sure to treat it that way.
6. Not a team sport.

Suggested techniques for reducing your storage and being more efficient—remember:

1. That which you send, you will also receive.

2. Once you hit the send button you have lost control.

3. Do not use the reply to all option unless you want to evacuate the building!

4. Delete is not a four letter word, send is. Delete old emails once a month and that includes emptying out your deleted items folder.

5. Store important information and documents received in a relevant folder off the email system and label them by topic, project or customer and in date order. Use a label that makes sense and is relevant to what you do ("Memo's 10-09" won't work)

6. Only communicate in a necessary context to individuals or teams (avoid splatter mail)

7. Do not routinely chain your email (an email message should not resemble a chain-of-custody form). Your answer is good enough.

8. You do not need to keep everything, so don't! If your email system mailbox (including file folders) has four figures in total messages you need to clean up your room!

Finally, the larger your mailbox becomes the harder it is to manage and the deeper the information is located. Even with the accessibility that technology provides, just recalling relevant information can be very difficult to do. Don't let your data fade into the digital darkness of an electronic landfill never to be retrieved or having to be recreated because you can't find it.

Email can be a tremendous resource if used correctly and with discipline. But bigger in this case is not better!

— Dan Fisher, The Wombat!

About the Author

Dan Fisher is president and CEO of The Copper River Group, a consulting firm headquartered in Fargo, N. D., that focuses on technology and payment systems research and consulting for community financial institutions. For nearly 30 years, Fisher has worked in the financial industry using technology to improve the bottom line. He was CIO of Community First Bankshares (now part of BancWest), has served as a director of the Federal Reserve Board of Minneapolis, the chairman of the American Bankers Association Payment Systems Committee, and was a member of the Independent Community Bankers of America Payments Committee. Fisher has written numerous articles on banking technology and the payments system. He has authored or co-authored six books and recently published a book titled, "Capturing Your

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P.S. To understand Dan's nickname, check out "About the Wombat" on his website, www.copperwombat.com.