

How to set up an efficient email system

By Graham Jones

Email takes up an average of one hour of your day - every day. That's a whole working day each week, roughly, spent just on email. If you don't manage it, then you are bound to spend even more time handling emails. Why? Because, even with the advent of social networking, the amount of email is increasing. There are now around 250bn email messages sent every day¹ to 1.4bn email users - that's nearly 180 messages every day of the week for each individual. And these numbers are predicted to more than double in the next three years. Like it or not, email is a significant part of our daily life and without management, it will become difficult to operate your business.

The first step in managing your email is to choose your system. There are three options:

1. A dedicated email program, such as Microsoft Outlook or Thunderbird
2. A webmail service, like Gmail or Hotmail
3. A shared service combining web and desktop, like Microsoft Exchange

Most people appear to opt for a dedicated program using webmail as an alternative access or as a backup service. However, this often means you have to manually control the two systems - they are not completely connected and so there is a potential for conflict and errors.

There are some ways out of this conundrum, though. One is to use a synchronisation tool and keep your email system on a USB memory stick. You can then take it wherever you want, ensuring your email is always up to date with your backup file on your main PC. However, this assumes you always have access to a computer with a USB port. If you want email on your mobile, or you visit an Internet Café then this may not be practicable.

So, you need a system whereby your email can be "in sync" whether you are using your office computer, your laptop, your mobile phone, a computer in a client's office, a terminal at an Internet Café or an email program on a memory stick. There are a few options which enable you to do this (almost...!).

One is to use Microsoft Outlook on your PC and connect that with a Premiere Google Apps account² (currently £33 a year). This allows you to ensure you have a virtual near-replica of your email system on your computer.

A similar system is Apple's MobileMe³ service, which lets you connect your desktop email program to an online system which also connects to your mobile devices.

An alternative is Zoho for Business⁴ which provides a host of features letting you share your settings and documents between your computer and "the cloud".

¹ <http://www.radicati.com/?p=3237>

² <http://www.google.com/apps/intl/en-GB/business/features.html>

³ <https://www.me.com>

Also worth considering is the 1&1 MailXChange service⁵. For individuals it costs less than £10 a month and provides a complete copy of your desktop system in a virtual, web-based access. The two remain in-sync and you are sure you will always have whatever you need, wherever you need it.

Of course, you can use free services, such as Gmail and Yahoo! Mail to provide you with an online copy of your desktop email system. However, that often requires lots of manual work, wasting time. Or you end up with two systems that are never quite the same. Even if you use the more sophisticated “IMAP” email system instead of the standard “POP” system, things are never quite the same because any storing of old emails has to be done manually on both your desktop and your virtual system.

Whatever you do, the increased use of email and the more mobile world we work in means you need to consider the system that best works for you. Inevitably, you need a system that allows you access old emails when you are away from your desk. Before you set up any kind of management system, your first priority should be to consider which methods of synchronisation you are going to use. My preferred system is using Microsoft Outlook on my PC, together with a Google Apps Premiere account for remote access and the Gmail App on my iPhone. Together, they ensure that my email system is replicated no matter where I am or what computer I am using.

Once you have a synchronised system in place, the next thing to consider is how you are going to use it. The best way to use email is to take one of three decisions on incoming mail. Should you:

- Delete it
- Act on it
- Store it

There is little else you can do with emails. Yet, many people have inboxes which are crammed full of emails. All this does is to make it seem like you have more work than is the case - thus de-motivating you. Furthermore, it makes it slow and difficult to find old emails which contain information you need. On top of that, it slows down your email system itself, further adding to the time wasted with processing emails.

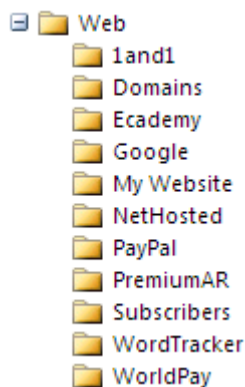
The best thing to do is to set up an email system with multiple folders or directories. You could, for instance, have a folder for “Clients” and then sub-folders for each individual client. You might also have a folder for Newsletters and then sub-folders for each kind of newsletter, with further sub-divisions for each individual organisation that sends you newsletters.

You will end up with dozens of folders - but this makes things easier to find in the future. They are only storage folders - to hold emails that have been previously processed, or which contain information you do not currently need, but may require in the future.

⁴ <https://business.zoho.com>

⁵ http://www.1and1.co.uk/?k_id=9319497

Here is an example showing just a selection of my folders.



And here is the identical list as it appears on Gmail via Google Apps

- [Inbox/Web](#)
- [Inbox/Web/1and1](#)
- [Inbox/Web/Domains](#)
- [Inbox/Web/Ecademy](#)
- [Inbox/Web/Google](#)
- [Inbox/Web/My Website](#)
- [Inbox/Web/NetHosted](#)
- [Inbox/Web/PayPal](#)
- [Inbox/Web/PremiumAR](#)
- [Inbox/Web/Subscribers](#)
- [Inbox/Web/WordTracker](#)
- [Inbox/Web/WorldPay](#)

Each of these folders is in sync - and on my iPhone as well.

When an email comes in all you need to do is decide whether it can be deleted straight away - that's easy. If it cannot be deleted should you answer it or deal with it in some way, or is it merely information you can use in the future?

If it is for future use, simply file it in the appropriate folder. This means your inbox is left only with emails you need to act upon. When you have acted upon those emails, move them to the appropriate folder.

The result will be that your inbox will usually only have a handful of emails which you need to work on - indeed on many occasions it will be empty.

This all assumes, of course, that you have an efficient spam filter in place so that your inbox does not become cluttered with nonsense you have to manually move yourself. We spend about 10 minutes every day simply deleting spam. According to one study, this means filtering out spam appears to take up an entire working week out of your year⁶. Another study⁷ even showed that around 10% of people have to

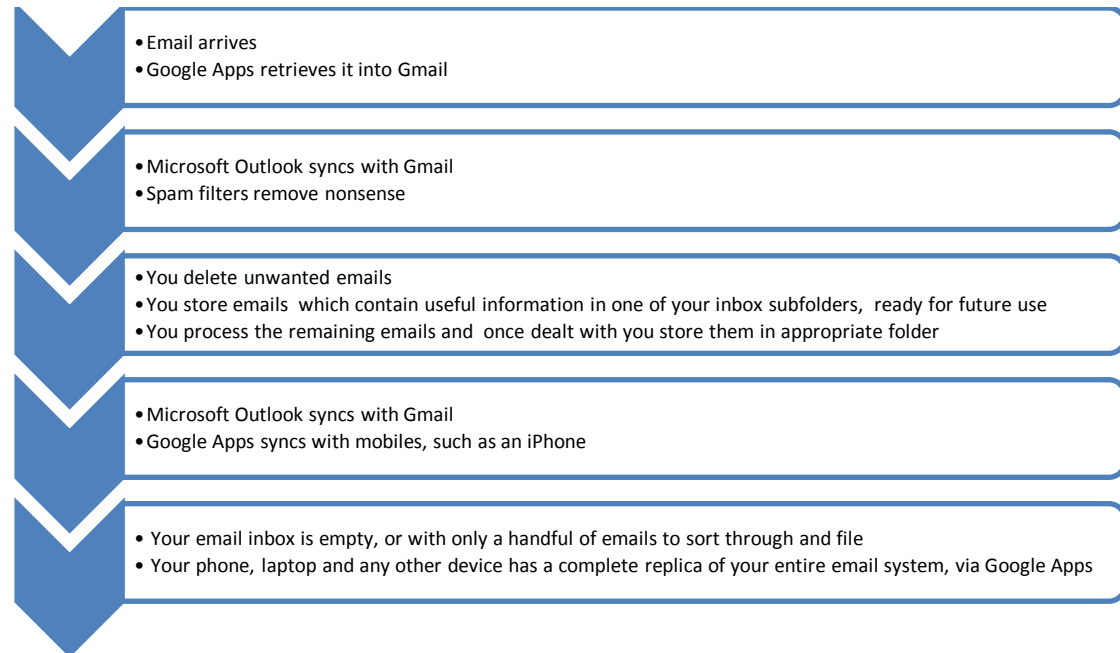
⁶ www.cleanmymailbox.com/htspyl.pdf

⁷ <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2003/Spam-How-it-is-hurting-email-and-degrading-life-on-the-Internet.aspx>

spend 30 minutes every day, simply to delete spam from their inbox. Clearly, if you don't have a spam filter, any improved management of email is going to only have a partial impact. If you want to see some reviews and comparisons of spam filters, take a look at:

<http://spam-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/>

So, in summary an efficient and effective email system runs like this:



For more information on setting up an efficient email system for your organisation contact Graham Jones on 0118 336 9710