

**Berg Kaprow Lewis**

Email

Email is a cheap, easy-to-use and fast communication tool. It can improve productivity and help with marketing.

This briefing is aimed at users who are looking to install a new email system or to upgrade an existing internal system to link to the Internet. It covers:

- The benefits of email.
- The cost of email.
- How to make the most of your email.
- Accessing email away from the office.

1 Business advantages

The benefits of email soon outweigh the capital cost of installing a system.

1.1 Email is **cheap**.

- Within a company network, mail is free.
- You can send messages to people over the Internet for the price of a short, local rate telephone call.

1.2 Email is **convenient**.

- Mail can be written and sent at any time.
- The recipient can read and answer the message when it is convenient.
As the sender, you can often get automatic notification that your emails have been received and read.
- Text can be cut and pasted to other applications, for quick, accurate working.

1.3 Email is usually extremely **fast**.

- Within a company network, delivery is nearly instantaneous.

- Transmission over the Internet normally takes a few seconds, though it may take several minutes if a large file is being sent.

2 What can I do with email?

2.1 You can compose and send plain **text messages** in seconds, within the office or to suppliers and customers.

- A quick email is often better than a phone or voicemail message, especially for content involving names, prices, specifications or detailed information.

2.2 Documents and other files can be attached to a message and sent at the same time.

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- You can attach any word processed documents, such as reports, contracts and formal letters. This means you can keep the original formatting.
- You can also use email to transfer database files, layouts and images, quickly and cheaply.

2.3 Marketing information of all kinds can be distributed immediately at virtually no cost.

2.4 Use email to **automate** simple processing.

- Many diary systems use email to schedule meetings between users automatically.
- Stock information can be sent out instantly and automatically in reply to a sales person's query.

Email and the law

A When you send an email, you are **liable** for its content.

- If your employees make libellous remarks in a private email (or a newsgroup posting), you could face legal action.
- Emails can be retrieved from the system long after they have been deleted.

B It is a good idea to add a **disclaimer** to your emails.

- These usually state that information in your emails is confidential. The legal standing of email disclaimers is debated, but they may deter lawsuits relating to your emails and will provide evidence of your good practice in this area.

C There are regulations dealing with an employer's right to **monitor** employees' emails, faxes and phone calls.

- Generally, you can monitor email traffic.
- You can inspect individual emails for 'specific business purposes'. (See **Website and email law**.)

D The use of email for marketing is the focus of **increasing regulation**.

- All unsolicited commercial emails must be clearly identified as such.
- You cannot send marketing emails to consumers, unincorporated partnerships and sole traders without their prior consent — unless their email address was collected in the course of a previous sale or sale negotiation,

2.5 Keep **up to date** with news and views.

- Get a customised newspaper by email.
- Monitor or take part in email discussion groups about your markets or industry.

3 What do I need?

Setting up an email system is not as expensive in time and resources as setting up a website, but it does require specialist software.

Sending email within an office and over the Internet may use different systems. Internal office email can normally link to the Internet, but Internet email software cannot normally support internal office email.

3.1 To access Internet email, you will need suitable **hardware**.

Typically, this will be a PC with a modem connected to a phone line.

- If you already have Internet access, you can use the same connection for email.
- If you use email (or the Internet) a lot, you may want a high-speed connection.
- In a small office, your existing network server should be able to support basic email. As traffic increases, you may need a dedicated email server. Budget between ten to 100Mb of disk space on the server per user for mail storage.

3.2 You will need an account with an **Internet service provider (ISP)**.

- A typical business-oriented ISP will offer unlimited email addresses, and allow you to connect your whole network to the Internet.
- A free ISP may suit light users with a single PC connected to the Internet. See **Internet service providers**.

3.3 Email **software** lets you send, receive and manage messages.

- Make sure software provides support for as many standards as possible, especially new standards.
- If you are using email over your office network, make sure that it can be upgraded to provide a link to the Internet.
- If you are using a stand-alone computer to access Internet mail, you can use your browser or the email software supplied free by your Internet service provider.
- Install special management software to monitor the flow of messages, detect viruses and filter out junk email messages, known as 'spam'.

Businesses that want to present a pan-European image can apply for a .eu domain name. From 7 April 2006 registration is open to all, and claims to a .eu domain name no longer require backup by a legal right. For more information visit www.eurid.eu.

“The temptation is for employees to spend hours emailing personal or humorous messages back and forth. Every office needs to have clear rules about what can and cannot be done.”
Tom McLaughlin, JLA

4 How much will it cost?

- 4.1** There will be modest costs for **software** and for connecting to the Internet (see **Going online**). The cost of email software usually varies in relation to the number of users on the system.
- If you have an internal office email system, you will need to set up a link to the Internet.
 - Register a suitable Internet domain name for your company, so that you can use a distinctive and memorable email address.

4.2 Checking your Internet email regularly increases running costs but is essential.

Marketing with email

Email is a useful marketing tool — fast, affordable and flexible. But you need to be clear about what you want to achieve with each mailing.

- A** Keep customers up to date with **prices and offers** and new product launches.
- B** Send regular **newsletters** to customers with no handling, print or postal charges.
- C** Send **press releases** to journalists and press agencies. (See **Effective PR**.)
- D** Using an email **signature file** including your business website address adds a marketing element to all of your outgoing emails.
- E** Take every legitimate opportunity to capture **email addresses** of customers, visitors to your website and people who enquire about your products.
- F** It is prohibited to send marketing emails to consumers, unincorporated partnerships and sole traders without obtaining your recipient's **prior consent**. There is an exemption for email addresses collected during a previous sale or sale negotiation.
- G** Ask customers to opt in to receiving your marketing emails and let them know how they can **unsubscribe** from your mailing list (see **Website and email law**).

If you intend to use email in your marketing, make sure you have people and systems in place to handle the replies. They will usually come in very quickly — within 48 hours. See **Marketing on the Internet**.

- Your telephone bill may increase as you use Internet email.
- If you are using a stand-alone computer, save telephone costs by composing your messages off-line. You can then connect and transfer all the messages in one go.
- Increasingly, individuals and businesses are using high-speed broadband connections to the Internet. These connections give you continuous Internet and email access.

4.3 Training improves efficiency and ensures users make the most of email software.

- Give users and new employees training to help them use email effectively.
- Your network manager will probably need training to manage the new software.

5 Privacy and security

Email messages are normally sent as plain text and could be read by a determined hacker. In the worst case, the content could be changed in transit or your identity forged.

5.1 Scramble the contents of private messages with the encryption feature that is part of most email software.

- Never transmit complete financial details within one unscrambled mail message.
- Set up your email software to keep copies of all messages you send.
- For very sensitive messages, use a separate high-security system, such as PGP.

5.2 Important messages, such as contract changes, should be signed with an **authenticated signature** that proves you are who you claim to be.

- Sophisticated email systems provide features to authenticate a message. If your system does not include authentication, you can use a separate software package.
- To implement authentication and signatures, you normally need to start with a special digital certificate, issued by a recognised authenticator (such as VeriSign, www.verisign.com).

5.3 Include guidance on the monitoring and inspection of emails in your **email policy**.

6 Email when travelling

Once you are used to email, you will probably want to send and receive it wherever you go.

“If you have an email address with an autoresponder, it will fire off copies of your online newsletter or price list every time a customer emails you. It's instant and automatic — no printing, no postage and untouched by human hand.”

Marcus Williamson,
Connectotel

6.1 Subscribing to a **worldwide** Internet service provider enables you to plug in a laptop and retrieve your messages.

- Many ISPs will give you local phone numbers to use in almost every country.
- When signing up with an ISP, check they offer worldwide access at reasonable prices.

Make sure you have the right telephone connector for the country you are going to. (Check what you will need at www.kropla.com/phones.htm).

6.2 Use one of the free, **web-based email** systems offered by Hotmail, Excite, Yahoo!, and others. These allow you access from any browser, anywhere in the world.

6.3 Alternatively, use a special **conversion system** to link telephone, fax and email.

- Systems such as j2 provide fax and telephone numbers that convert messages to documents which are sent to you as attachments to email messages.
- Use email-to-fax software to forward your messages to a hotel fax machine.

6.4 Forward email messages from your office to another account.

- Use selective forwarding to send only important documents. The facilities offered vary from one service provider to another.
- Some email systems allow you to set up an automatic 'out-of-the-office' message, which warns people if you will not be reading your email for a few days.
- If you are accessing messages over a slow link or from a handheld computer, leave large attachments for later.

6.5 Use the latest technology to access your email **on the move**.

- Check your messages and go online by linking your handheld or portable computer to a mobile phone.
- WAP mobile phones allow you to send and receive emails without a computer, wherever you are.

7 Problems with email

Email provides many benefits, but it can also create problems. Setting up, and enforcing, an email policy is essential (see **An email policy for your employees**).

7.1 Normal **business sense** and tact often

get lost in email messages, because the medium is so easy and quick to use.

- Train users to regard an email as being as important as a letter.
- Make sure users adopt the right tone and avoid inappropriate remarks or jokes.
- Think and consider every message, before dashing off a quick reply.

7.2 Files attached to emails can contain **viruses** that could damage your computer system.

- Always install virus-checking software on your computer or, if you are using a network email system, on the server.
- Keep your virus detector up to date with details of new viruses by installing updates from the virus-checker manufacturers.
- Simple text messages present no danger, but viruses can be hidden inside attachment files.

No attachment should ever be opened without being virus-checked, especially if it comes from an unfamiliar source. See **Security and the Internet**.

7.3 Unwanted or unsolicited email messages — spam — waste time, slow up communication links and are annoying.

- Use anti-spam software to delete most unsolicited messages automatically.
- You can use an external anti-spam and anti-virus service (such as Email Systems or MessageLabs). This keeps spam and viruses out of your network completely so your computers do not have to waste time and resources processing them.
- Do not give out your email address in newsgroups or mailing lists.
- Before subscribing to online newsletters, check their policies on the re-sale of lists.

7.4 Too many messages can quickly lead to **information overload**.

- Allocate a certain amount of time per day for handling email. Do not let your email inbox overflow or become cluttered.
- Users must resist the temptation to check their email many times per hour.
- Most programs provide filters that allow you to sort emails automatically according to addressee, sender or topic.
- If there is a long or complex message that needs investigation before you can give a proper answer, do not just leave it. Take a few seconds to acknowledge receipt and let the sender know you will reply as soon as possible.

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Further help

There are other Directors' Briefing titles that can help you. These briefings are referred to in the text by name, such as **Internet service providers**.

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