

## **ELECTRONIC MAIL**

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If you need to communicate with others but don't want to play telephone tag; if you want to save on long distance phone costs, if you want to share documents with others, or if you wish to solve problems and receive advice from network discussion groups, then electronic mail is for you!

Electronic mail, commonly called 'E-mail', is a very useful tool in today's business world. It can put a stop to the seemingly endless "telephone tag game". E-mail is an electronic communications system that is used to send information from one person or computer to another. Many people and businesses are starting to take advantage of the capabilities of electronic mail.

Tools needed to access electronic mail include: a computer, modem, and communications software, or an account on a mainframe computer which has electronic mail capabilities.

Messages, which can be data, text, or graphs, can be sent around the world to any number of people simultaneously and the messages arrive almost instantaneously. Because each message is converted to ASCII before being sent out, an E-mail system will allow an IBM PC to communicate with non IBM computers such as an Apple, a Commodore 64, or a mainframe computer.

A standard piece of electronic mail may contain a line stating who the mail is from (the sender), who the mail is going to (the receiver), a date line, a short subject line, and the text.

Once a receiver receives a piece of mail, he or she can reply to the sender, forward the mail to others (with or without first adding supplementary comments), save it in electronic form, and/or print the message in paper form.

The sender can send "carbon" copies to others, request an automatic acknowledgment from the receiver, send the mail as priority or urgent, log an electronic copy of the mail for further reference, and/or make a paper copy.

In addition to the above features, most systems have an on-line help facility with step-by-step instructions available to both the sender and receiver.

An electronic bulletin board system is a file that can be established within an electronic mail system. Depending on the purpose of the bulletin board, people can log on it to place or retrieve information, messages, or other offerings. In addition to being a forum for discussion, a bulletin board usually provides

users with a software library that can be transferred to the user's own computer memory.

When information or messages are placed on the system, the bulletin board organizes the material and makes it available to others. A bulletin board can be considered interactive in the sense that users can both place and retrieve information.

Though bulletin board programs differ from one another, the user is typically permitted to choose a function from a menu, and is then guided through by the system. System functions can include: Scanning topics, reading or posting messages, replying to messages, or requesting help.

Bulletin boards can be used and thought of much like a cork bulletin board hung in an office break room -- to list job openings, office news, price changes, and as a means to distribute general information.

When considering which electronic mail system to use, security is one of the biggest issue most people have to consider. A company would not want to send a price list out to all of it's branch offices and salespersons if it could not guarantee that the list would not fall into the hands of competitors.

So far the law does not protect electronic mail in a way comparable to the way that it does more conventional means of correspondence. A law protecting E-mail would pose an enormous challenge for lawmakers. However, most systems have some built in security features, such as requiring users to use an account ID and password before sending or receiving messages. Security can be enhanced by keeping passwords top secret, never writing an account ID and password down on the same piece of paper, changing your password regularly (if the system allows for this), not choosing an obvious password, and/or by developing a special encryption method to send and receive mail.

You may be asking, 'What can electronic mail do for me?'. Here are several uses: Salespeople can send a message asking the home office questions or send in orders. Medical personnel in remote areas can consult with experts located at central medical facilities. Students can turn in their homework using e-mail. Cabinet members at the White House use E-mail to send memos to other members. Business persons traveling can communicate with the office back home. Researchers stationed in different areas can work on the same project by sending data and such using E-mail. People with a similar interest (like SAS\*) can form discussion lists (like SAS-L) to communicate with others with the same interest. There are many, many uses for electronic mail!

Though electronic mail has recently gained popularity, it is not new. The roots of electronic mail reach back to the mid-1800's with the development of telegraphic and facsimile transmissions. Modern day electronic mail technology and communications networking

systems evolved largely after World War II.

Electronic mail faced a number of problems during its early years, including psychological, economic, and political obstacles. Much of the early equipment and many of the networks were not designed to interact, and electronic mail systems were not used to their best advantage. Consultants were scarce and users lacked technical expertise, therefore messages generally were sent and received ineffectively.

During the 1980's, electronic mail gained worldwide acceptance, influencing the academic, international business, scientific, and political communities, as well as affecting global thinking and interaction.

As electronic mail became more user friendly and more accessible, it grew in popularity and even caused the creation of new positions. Firms created an information systems management position to answer the needs of establishing a communication networks and training personnel to use the system productively.

Today, the pressures for fast information exchange, combined with the availability and lower prices of computers and technologies, have made it economically feasible for all sectors of the economy to use electronic mail equipment. Nearly everyone has access to a computer, either through a public library, at their place of business, or at home.

Electronic mail also helps with another of today's problems, it cuts down on the amount of paper being used. If every company started using electronic mail to send inter-office memos, the use of paper would go down!

#### Trademark Notice

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#### Bibliography

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