

Email Gets Easier

By William Powell

I stand by my December column, in which I maintain that email threatens to overwhelm U.S. workers. But findings from the Pew Internet and American Life Project claim that the majority of U.S. workers with email access—“work emailers” as the report refers to them—are handling their email load with relative ease. Of the nearly 2500 work emailers surveyed, 60 percent receive 10 or fewer messages on an average day; less than half (48 percent) report an increase

in incoming mail over the past year. In fact, 65 percent describe their email load as not being a problem.

Those figures may come as a surprise. When I think of dealing with email, the word that typically springs to mind isn't *easy*; but it does have an *e* with double hockey sticks. I often receive 10 emails every couple of hours. According to Pew, I (and about 20 percent of work emailers) fall into the category of “power emailers.” We're the ones that typically

receive more than 30 emails per day, check our email obsessively, and then write about how the rest of the working world is e-swamped. Actually, power emailers appreciate email even more than standard users do, says the report, valuing its "impact on the substance of work and peripheral benefits in the workplace." In other words, they can't live without email. And with that, I agree completely.

The Pew study is a fascinating read that addresses the whole of email's effect on working life, from the way we handle daily tasks to how we communicate with those around us. For a full report, visit the Pew Internet and American Life Website http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP_Work_Email_Report.pdf.

Quick Tip

Ever feel as if you've come in on the wrong end of an email conversation? Microsoft Outlook, like most email applications, lets users toggle the order in which email is displayed.

To avoid confusion, email connoisseurs suggest that you list your messages from oldest to newest. To do so with Outlook, find the Receive heading atop the pane for your Inbox. Following Receive is an arrow pointing either up or down. To toggle to oldest message first, click on the heading so that the arrow points up

To target a specific subject, click on the Subject heading. To return to a date-received arrangement, click again on Received.

You've Got Discs

Last holiday season, anyone who purchased items over the Web or through mail order likely found a little something extra in one of their boxes: a gift from the folks at AOL cordially inviting them to sign up and receive 1000 hours of on-line use free.

What? You say you received more than one? Well, you're not alone. Despite having 35 million subscribers worldwide, Internet provider AOL continues a marketing campaign with free discs of the latest version.

Jim McKenna and John Lieberman have created a Website devoted to ending AOL's practice. Their plan is to collect 1 million CDs (nearly 17 tons) and haul them across country from their home in El Cerrito, California, to AOL's front door in Virginia. Included with their delivery will be a request for AOL to stop sending the CDs.

"AOL is unlikely to change its behavior without a large public demonstration [of] dissatisfaction. Getting some of its junk mail back each day will have little if any effect. However, receiving several truckloads of their CDs all at once in broad daylight, with the media in full attendance, will have a larger impact," say the two on their Website www.nomoreaolcds.com.

AOL is far from alone in its CD-by-mail campaign. Microsoft, AT&T Worldnet, and Earthlink all follow the same practice. But AOL has gained the reputation for being the worst offender. The company won't say how many CDs it mails each year, but you'll have a hard time finding someone who hasn't received at least one in his or her mailbox.

In the Internet company's defense, AOL's policy encourages recipients of unwanted CDs to return them to AOL for recycling. However, Nomoreaolcds.com counters that AOL discs are sent 4th-class with no return postage paid, forcing postal workers to sort and throw them into the trash.

At last count, McKenna and Lieberman's site had collected 103,989 program CDs, well shy of their goal. But the movement is spreading and already has global alliance members in France, Germany, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

One group that won't be rushing to send in their AOL CDs are collectors. Ebay is doing a brisk business. In October 2002, for its premier of AOL 8.0, even AOL got on board and distributed 8000 designer discs to Bloomingdales customers. The CDs sported designs from Kate Spade, Donna Karan, and others and brought upwards of US\$100 each on eBay. Rare ones with tie-ins to popular films, such as *Star Wars*, consistently sell for more than \$50.

What would make collectors and conservationists happy is increased availability of affordable broadband connections. New users could download AOL's latest version in just a few minutes, rendering the CDs impractical, which, in turn, would drive up prices for collectible ones.

Notable and Quotable

"When it comes to technology, most people overestimate it in the short-term and underestimate it in the long-term."

Arthur C. Clarke,
author of *2001:
A Space Odyssey*

Sprechen Sie Web?

As the first country to exploit the powers of the Internet, the United States tends to see itself at the center of the Internet universe, and thus there's a belief that the official language of the Web is English. But the fact of the matter is that the World Wide Web is just that, worldwide.

Data from Global Reach regarding online language usage shows that only 36.5 percent of the global online population are native English speakers. Though that figure is more than three times the next biggest language group, Chinese with 10.8

percent, when broken into region, the figures are more even.

Speakers of European languages account for 35.5 percent; Asian languages account for 25.8 percent. Online usage of specific languages:

- English—36.5 percent
- Chinese—10.8
- Japanese—9.3
- Spanish—7.2
- German—6.6
- Korean—4.4
- Italian—3.8
- French—3.5
- Portuguese—3

Fast Facts

Six percent of Americans check their email compulsively.

◀ Source/The Center for Internet Studies

During the workweek, 53 percent of U.S. business users check their email at least six times a day.

◀ Source/Gartner

The phrase "You've Got Mail" is heard more than 63 million times per day.

◀ Source/CBS News

You've Got Google

Some Web-based applications are like the corkscrews on Swiss army knives: There's rarely a need to use them, but when there is they're indispensable.

Cape Clear Software offers two such services to Netizens free of charge. The first is GoogleMail; the second is AmazonMail. As the names imply, they provide email access to the popular Google search engine and Amazon.com. Just address your message to google@capeclear.com or amazon@capeclear.com, include your query in the subject line, and send. A reply email with your results is delivered in minutes.

The services are intended for users of mobile devices such as cell phones and PDAs, with which logging on to the Web still incurs additional charges. Users can compose an email query offline, log on to send, log off, and then download the query with other messages at a later date.

GoogleMail has become so popular in some Asian and European countries, where Internet usage is still rather costly, that Cape Clear reports thousands of queries per month. So, the next time you're traveling and hear someone lament, "I'd look it up on Google if only it wasn't so expensive," Save the day with GoogleMail.

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The Web covers Internet technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to theweb@astd.org.