

“ The proactive leaders in business today realize that they have the power to manage communications within their organizations, and a savvy leader knows that smart use of e-mail can drive business and increase revenue. ”

The End Of E-Mail? Not A Chance

Editor's Note: The following was submitted by Bill Lyons, CEO of AXS-One, a provider of records compliance management solutions in Rutherford, N.J.

Some high-profile figures have lately and publicly declared a moratorium on e-mail. For example, the CEO of a Silicon Valley software company sparked buzz by proclaiming that he was going back to more personal, verbal communication as his main means of interacting with others. In October, *The Wall Street Journal* documented how the COO of U.S. Cellular, Jay Ellison, mandated “no-e-mail Fridays” at his company in order to cut down on the volume of electronic communication. (For the record, his employees balked, citing concern about managing workload without it.)

Even more visibly, Jon Corzine, former boss of Wall Street giant Goldman Sachs and currently governor of New Jersey, has also proclaimed a no-e-mail rule—he’s decided to “go back to the 1920s and have direct conversations with people.” For the record, Corzine’s reasons may not be entirely altruistic. Legislators want to see e-mails he sent to a state union president whom he dated before becoming governor, and he’s claiming executive privilege. Corzine’s never been a heavy user of e-mail anyway, but the idea of a blanket ban on a medium that drives virtually all communication has generated a lot of attention.

It’s clear that e-mail is the backbone of business communications and operations today—most of us could not even begin to imagine doing business without it—as borne out by the employees at U.S. Cellular. So assuming we accept this fact, what’s driving the sudden trend in turning back the clock on e-mail?

Let’s first look at volumes. There is no denying that e-mail usage and volumes are growing, not slowing. These recent denouncements of e-mail are a blip—according to estimates from research firm IDC, the size of business e-mail volumes sent worldwide in 2007 will approach 5 Exabytes, nearly doubling the amount over the past two years. Managing the inevitable growth in e-mail

from an operational and storage optimization perspective is a challenge. Attempting to stop its usage in order to reduce the operational overhead is a shortsighted measure and completely unaligned with reality.

And while the costs associated with e-mail may be a concern, the real issue at hand is risk and risk management—what happens if your e-mail becomes the subject of a subpoena or litigation? For most enterprises, regulatory requirements and, increasingly, litigation, are part of the cost of doing business.

Note we’re talking here about electronic records, not just e-mail. Anyone who is concerned that electronic communication might be subpoenaed or otherwise scrutinized should know that the regulatory and legal requirements apply to all electronic communications formats, not just e-mail. That includes less formal electronic communications that are appearing in the workplace, such as texting and instant messaging. Adoption of these alternatives to e-mail is growing exponentially. Forward-thinking employees are using whatever communication vehicles are most productive for them. For the next generation of students and future employees, don’t be surprised if their cell phone bills show more texts than calls.

Proactive, forward-thinking organizations are developing policies around usage and records management, deciding which e-mails need to be retained and for how long, and what you can and cannot say in e-mail or other electronic communication. They have systems in place that electronically enforce those policies and ensure that e-mail can be automatically preserved in the event of litigation. When e-mail and other electronic communications are properly managed and retained, it is a win-win for all.

So here’s a message CEOs should receive: Don’t be afraid of e-mail. The proactive leaders in business today realize that they have the power to manage communications within their organizations, and a savvy leader knows that smart use of e-mail can drive business and increase revenue. Business is all about change and growth, and ignoring such an essential business tool is extremely myopic. With an understanding of the new regulations and the right mix of technology, e-mail is an asset for any organization.

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