

Much has been written about the impact of 'email overload', in terms of the productivity cost and impact on attention spans for staff.

There is another very real cost of the reliance on email: the duplication of information management activities.

'All staff' emails are often used to send out new policies and procedures, product updates and other changes. These can range from a few paragraph to 50 pages, and it is left for each staff member to keep track of this information.

In an organisation of 1,000 staff, this leads to the effort of managing these updates being multiplied by a factor of a thousand, generating a significant impact on productivity, consistency and accuracy.

Corporate communication via email

'All staff' emails are often used as the primary way of distributing many types of information, including new policies and procedures, changes to IT systems, training materials and product updates.

In many cases, staff need to keep this information for later use. In practice, most staff store these messages in elaborate folders within their email program, so they can be quickly searched when needed.

Every staff person comes up with their own folder structure, and conducts their own information management activities.

In practice, these email folders continue to grow until IT enforces limits on mailbox sizes, and they are required to delete potentially valuable information to meet IT policies.

If allowed, long-serving staff often accumulate hundreds of megs of emails, which they forward onto more junior staff in response to questions or requests.

These practices are clearly inefficient and hugely duplicated, as well as having a major impact on the quality and consistency of operations across the organisation.

However, without any central resource that stores all of these updates, staff have no choice but to look after their own information needs. In

many cases, the most successful staff are those who have the best 'nest building' skills.

Prevent 'all staff' emails

It is frankly bizarre that in an age of email overload, many organisations still allow everyone in an organisation to send 'all staff' emails.

All too often, this facility is used inappropriately, to communicate the sale of a second-hand fridge, or to announce that someone is leaving.

It then becomes a management issue to deal with the problems, backed up by an 'appropriate email usage' policy (that no-one has read).

The most obvious solution is simply to cut off general access to the 'all staff' email facility, providing it only to key staff members, such as senior executives, members of the IT helpdesk, and the corporate communications team.

Practical (and simple) steps

The core principle is then to *corporately manage* key corporate information. Information updates are an important consideration for a large number of staff, and should be treated as such.

This includes taking steps such as:

- Introducing a new policy around publishing information to the intranet, as discussed in the earlier article *Intranets as the first source of information*.
- Creating areas on the intranet that provide a permanent and well-structured home for all information updates.
- Publishing updates first to the intranet, and then communicating via email, linking back to the intranet.
- Ensuring that a full archive of updates is kept, allowing staff to easily find specific details when required.
- Consolidating updates into the main body of policies, procedures and product information, eliminating much of the need to find updates at a later date.

Only once these very basic steps have been taken can more extensive efforts be made to resolve broader information management challenges within organisations.