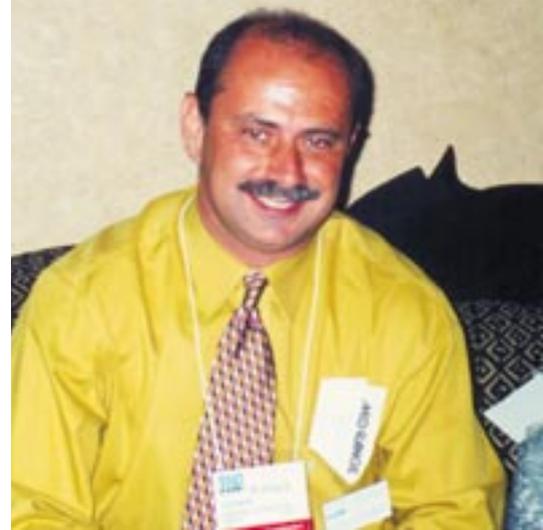


President's Corner

By Richard Dolewski,
President, Toronto Users Group for Midrange Systems



Richard Dolewski

E-mail Overload and Attitude!

Do you ever feel overwhelmed by e-mail? Do you ever have to struggle to get through all of your messages from one day to the next. You sign on early at home. Eyes filled with sleep to get a head start, work with it all day, and even sign on during the precious evening hours just to stay afloat. Does getting one more frivolous message ever make you angry or does it make you just wonder why in the world did he "cc" me on that? Should I be offended or happy to be part of the 50 person distribution list?

Do you just want to let that person know how you really feel? Well just hold tight and do not let your fingers run faster than your brain.

It probably wasn't always this way. When you started using e-mail, you probably only got a trickle of e-mail messages each day. You thought getting 10 messages was enough. We would actually peek numerous times a day in hope of getting an e-mail. Times have changed. A year passes and you got that promotion at work and started getting thirty messages per day.

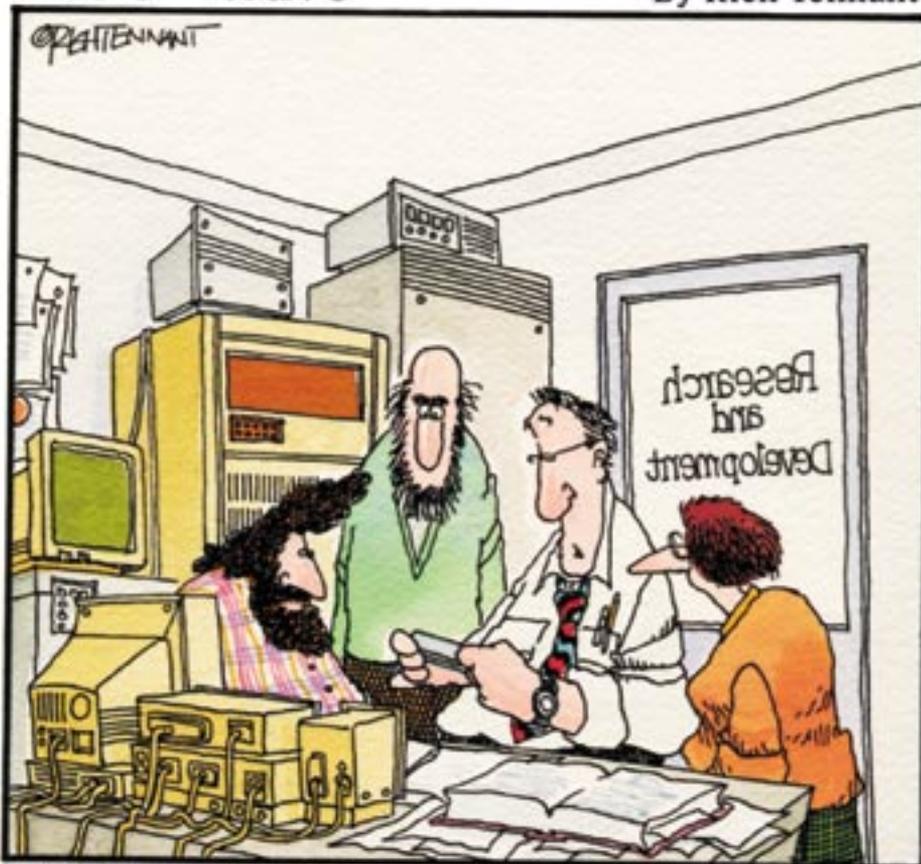
Finally yesterday you came to work and found ten messages regarding IBM business or announcements, news that people have changed jobs, three bad jokes, seven messages complaining about the choice for the XMAS party or cost, nine messages which venue to go to for lunch which usually never does happen anyway, four announcements of new projects put on hold, eight direct questions about some aspect of your job, two notices that someone parked in the Director's Parking Spot, numerous SPAM mail that still made it past the fire wall, and fifty other similarly random messages. Does this hit home?

Little by little, your trickle turned into a flood, and now you are gasping for air. You dread that message "You got mail", or stare at the message "receiving 1 of 143 messages" for your reading delight. Does this sound like you? What is happening out there? What makes e-mail different?

With e-mail documents, your recipient can ask questions and answer them immediately. This is part of the problem. We have stopped thinking and tend to send back an immediate response. Usually with some emotion attached. E-mail thus tends to be sloppier than communications on paper. It no longer makes sense to slave over a message for hours, making sure that your spelling is faultless, if the point of the message is to tell your co-worker that you are ready to go to lunch. E-mail also does not convey emotions nearly as well as face-to-face or even telephone conversations.

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Yes, it's wireless; and yes, it weighs less than a pound; and yes, it has multiuser functionality... but it's a stapler."

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It lacks vocal tones and gestures. This leads to your correspondent having difficulty telling if you are serious or kidding, happy or sad, frustrated or just @#\$. Sarcasm is *particularly* dangerous to use in e-mail. The most difficult thing to convey in e-mail is emotion. People frequently get in trouble for typing exactly what they would say out loud. Unfortunately, without the tone of voice to signal their emotion, it is easy to misinterpret their intent.

Keep your e-mails simple. Notify only those that need to know. **Never** reply to all with history with an “OK” to something. Another tip: putting your manager’s manager on the distribution list often leads to many questions of “Why did he cc him?” Or are we always in a CYB (cover your behind) way of thinking? When a message is sent to you directly, there is usually no need to reply to all on the distribution list. Staff are rewarded based on merit not on who they cc for not getting the job done!

Another important point is to use clear “Subject Lines” especially with all the

viruses out there. This helps a reader click to your e-mail quicker based on a project you’re working on, especially when these messages are being archived. Do not mark every message urgent. If you are offering non-urgent information that requires no response from the other person, prefacing the subject line with FYI: (For Your Information) is not a bad idea. Subject: FYI: donuts in classroom. (Now this may be urgent if they are Krispy Crèmes.)

A number of e-mails include a jargon or language that I do not understand. Here are some of the most common acronyms and expressions I have seen:

- BTW** – By The Way
- FYI** – For Your Information
- RTFM** – Read The Manual or Read the “#@%@% Manual”
- RSN** – Real Soon Now
- TTFN** – Ta-Ta For Now
- TIA** – Thanks in Advance

What planet are these people coming from? I need a shorthand course to decipher if I should be acting on the message,

be insulted, or simply just delete it. One I do like is “NRN”, for “No Response Needed”. Speak English please...

The theme for this month’s TUG MoM is “Wireless”. Soon we will all be able to receive wireless e-mails anytime, anywhere... All the more reason to get our use (or abuse) of e-mail under control.

In summary, keep everything short. Keep your lines short, keep your paragraphs short, and keep the message short. That’s why they invented attachments. That is if you remember to attach them in the first place. Understand how many people you are asking to look at your e-mail message. Sometimes we write all these e-mails because we know the recipient is too busy to take a call. Consider that he may also be too busy to read your e-mail. We all need to think twice before we press the send icon. Pick up that phone, walk down the hall, and simply ask the person “Are you ready for lunch?” Remember e-mail should be used to keep you more productive and keep your business moving, not bring it to a halt. 

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