

## **e-Filing for Beginners**

*David Beesley, managing director of IT consultancy Network Defence looks at the issue of email archiving, and how regulatory compliance, the rise in email and the lack of enforceable policy make it a must-have in the business place*

Email is the new paper. It is now used for over 80% of written business communication.

Given the exponential rise in email-based business communication over recent years, there is a definite need for the e-filing cabinet, in order to store, manage and utilise email based information effectively.

Where previously organisations would have row-upon-row of subterranean filing cabinets, now documents can be housed virtually, slashing storage costs and streamlining the archiving and retrievals process.

### **Compliance, Compliance, Compliance.**

However, securely storing and archiving e-based business communications is not just a nice-to-have, it's a must-have.

Compliance is a major driver, it's true. Various regulations require companies to retain certain documents for a specified number of years. For example, Sarbanes-Oxley specifies that documents relating to financial business decisions need to be retained for seven years.

All companies need a long-term email retention capability, managed independently of the primary server and independently of the end user, to provide a clear and valuable audit trail of business decisions and operation, and to be able to access email-based invoices, contracts and transactions if a discovery audit or request for information is made.

## **Regulations and Red Tape Gone Mad?**

Isn't this all overly big brother and controlling, you might think? Not at all. You wouldn't leave a signed sales contract or invoice as an impromptu coffee mat or to be binned, so why treat the e-based equivalent any differently?

It's surely sound business sense and best practice to store them securely. Business documents are critical assets – sources of corporate knowledge, customer histories, long-term trends, that are useful after the retention period requirement is over. Old reasons for not storing are no longer valid, as costs are low and retrieval software is advanced and readily available.

## **A scalable solution for the future**

So how best should organisations go about migrating to email storage? Storing email on the server - given the exponential rise in the volume of emails being sent and the time they need to be stored for – is simply not an option. It reduces server performance, particularly for back-up and recovery purposes, and will therefore impact directly on business performance.

This is why businesses need a robust and formalised email archiving mechanism in place. What's needed is a scalable solution, able to handle ever-increasing data volumes without performance degradation, and which will comply with all statutory, industry and best practice requirements for email retention and management.

## **Think Outside the Box – Smart Filing and Data Mining**

Email archiving needn't be a necessary evil. The right approach and solution not only ticks regulatory boxes, it will also help you to harness the information contained within emails as an invaluable form of business intelligence – a rich vein of customer information which can be exploited to drive growth and achieve business goals.

Without a formal archiving mechanism in place, a significant amount of valuable data stored in emails will get deleted, incorrectly filed or lost. Being able to store and then easily locate and use this data can have a powerful impact on business productivity, customer service, and risk and opportunity management.

By provisioning staff and management with smart folders, they have a means of indexing and easily accessing email communication and business data. For example, an account director can view all emails exchanged with a client, or a

finance director can access all communications with certain suppliers. In this way, staff can get a snapshot of the critical information they need in real-time, to help make informed business decisions.

The ability to mine email data and analyse the flow of email is a useful business tool, in helping to identify email patterns and trends. By gaining an effective overview of communication with key customers, who is doing the communicating and how frequently, managers can optimise business performance and develop more powerful customer relationship management.

### **Driving Business Forward**

Leading supply chain specialists CPG Logistics, given the nature of its business, relies heavily on email communications, and needed an email security and management solution to ensure email provision, compliance and brand integrity.

CPG opted for the Mimecast management platform, which provides CPG with the assurance of long-term email preservation and audit trails, in order to meet the rigorous regulatory and compliance issues associated with operating on a UK and international level.

The solution fully integrates into CPG's logistics and order management system, delivering a scalable and centrally managed store and audit trail of company email communications, whether generated by employees or by the company's SAP/R3 business process system, ensuring complete compliance and helping to optimise business processes.