Is e-mail still timely in day-to-day business?

The triumphal success of e-mail is impressive – it's hard to imagine doing business without it. Or maybe so. Could the digital age signal the end of digital mail?

Checking your e-mails after a two-week vacation can be a shock: "You've got 683 new messages" – the computer knows no mercy. The Radicati Group, a market research institute specializing in technology, guestimates that around 205.6 billion e-mails are being sent and received each day. Even if you deduct the immense number of unwanted spam mails from that figure (ca. 80 to 90 percent), every person on earth receives numerous e-mails daily.

Looking back on the predecessor of the e-mail, which has been used for centuries, the sheer number of e-mails lets us conclude that traditional letters are a thing of the past. E-mails rule the business world. But that's not really the case. Considering the approx. 3 billion letters delivered by Australia Post in 2016, one can hardly claim the extinction of letters on paper. Yet they no longer have the importance they did a decade ago. Today, bank statements, invoices and even contracts are mostly sent electronically or can be accessed digitally via, e.g., PDF files. And most of what's being sent out on paper these days is junk mail or private letters.

Keys to success

So what makes e-mails so exceptionally successful? The answer is pretty clear: Within seconds, your offer will reach your business partner, no matter if he/she is located in Berlin or Brazil. E-mails can be sent quickly and practically free of charge. At the same time, e-mails are also highly insecure, about – when sent unencrypted – as secure as a postcard. Sending vital business data with an attached PDF or Word file without considering the security implications is an act of gross negligence. Cybercriminals, intelligence services and not least your competition are all keenly interested in what you want to communicate.

Condemning e-mails altogether would be unjust, however: Highly professional and extremely

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affordable options for secure e-mail delivery have been around for quite a while, and ease of use is no longer a differentiater. In most cases it's habit or laziness that makes us forget to seal the digital envelope. What's more, particularly smaller companies fail to provide employees with clear instructions as to what has to be observed when communicating digitally. Misconduct is therefore preprogrammed.

More quality – less quantity

It is not without reason that many employees as well as IT administrators and security experts complain that today's flood of e-mails are actually detrimental to a company's success. Not every member of a department or a team necessarily needs to be informed about each message. While in analog times, the carbon paper physically ensured that a fourth copy of a document was nearly illegible, today each mail can be sent as a virtual carbon copy ("CC") to countless recipients. Often the number of CC recipients is so vast that there's practically no control over which information goes where. This can very quickly cause mission-critical statements or figures to reach external employees or even a competitors. But even if that's not the case: An ever-growing number of non-relevant information clogs inboxes, costs work time and demotivates employees.

Especially with regard to highly important communication with customers or partners via e-mail, it is better to filter and archive e-mails by integrating them into a state-of-the-art DMS or ECM solution. This has the added advantage of drastically reducing the number of e-mails. In the long run, only these technologies can help ensure that e-mail-based workflows are flexible and fast. Few would argue: The distribution, editing and archiving of information and data sent by e-mail has to be made more efficient.

Not everything has to be e-mailed

What about short and mostly informal e-mail traffic between colleagues? Collaboration tools can provide a remedy here too, drawing a clear dividing line between official business communication and brief exchanges between colleagues. Primarily younger workers who privately use services such as WhatsApp are keen to adopt similar solutions for business such as Microsoft Yammer, SAP Jam or Salesforce Chatter. The number of messages won't automatically decrease but there is far better channeling. It's highly likely that Mr. Smith from bookkeeping couldn't care less about the news that the presentation for the client meeting on the following day has been finished on time. The team that's responsible for the meeting, however, will be delighted to hear this.

It won't come as a surprise that today's DMS and ECM solutions already reflect this channeled discourse.

See how KYOCERA can help you establish a secure and managed document environment at our enterprise content management (ECM)-related website.

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