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Profile on Email

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Electronic mail, more commonly known as email, is a method of exchanging messages between people through the use of electronic devices. In the modern era, it is expected that every person has an email address as it has become one of the most common methods of communication. The purpose of email is to convey a message to someone, whether business or personal related, that the recipient can respond to at their own convenience. While the argument can be made that email has since become out of date with the current generation favoring instant messaging, email is still essential for many people, with the business world still relying heavily on email to provide an easy, fast, and inexpensive way to communicate with people.

Like many new technologies, the military played a big role in the invention of email. While other technological breakthroughs had to be made in order to lead to the invention of email, ultimately the technology was created by DARPA, the government agency under the Department of Defense, whose sole mission is to develop emerging technologies for use by the military (Banks). Ray Tomlinson, a computer programmer at DARPA, is credited with inventing email. Tomlinson contributed to the technology by introducing the “@” symbol in email addresses, which allowed for messages to be targeted to users on different computers (Crocker). While the concept of email had existed since 1965, Tomlinson was the first person to successfully connect messages between different machines (Crocker). In 1973, the email standard was proposed which included aspects that we commonly associate with email systems today, such as the forwarding option, the subject line, and the to and from fields.

As computers became more popular across the United States, email was on the rise as well. In 1988, Microsoft Mail was released for Apple’s OS computer system, enabling only Apple users to send messages to each other (Gibbs). In 1989, CompuServe became the first major online service provider, offering dial up internet services, and in 1992 launched an application for email (Banks). In 1993, Microsoft launched Hotmail, an email server that was not exclusive to Apple computers and after this release other companies begin to jump on the email boom. In 1997, Yahoo released Yahoo Mail, which currently ranks as the third most popular web email service in the United States (Gibbs). With the amount of daily email users skyrocketing, email spam became a new phenomenon and by 2003, 30% of total email traffic was already spam. In order to counter this, Congress passed the US CAN-SPAM Act of 2003, requiring the Federal Trade Commission to enforce and crack down on spam emails (Wired). In 2004, Google joined the email revolution with the creation of Gmail, which as of April 2016, has one billion users worldwide (Lardinois). With all the convenience email brought to this world, it had one significant setback; it was contingent upon the user being online on a computer. That all changed with the launch of the iPhone in 2007. The smartphone brought email to the mobile era and the convenience of sending an email was unprecedented. Anyone could now read an email anywhere at any time.

The importance of email is not restricted to just sending and receiving messages. Having an email address is just as important as well. With the internet essential to many of our daily functions, email has grown increasingly vital as well. In order to job search today a person needs an email address. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn require an email address to register for the service and periodically send users account updates through email. Additionally, email is also used now as a method for leaving a message. For example, if a Queens College student has a question for the registrar’s office, there is an option to leave a message on their website. While it doesn’t appear as if the user is sending an email, the email technology is actually built into the system and any reply from the staff is received through the inquirer’s email. Another example of email being used for an alternative purpose is for stores to onboard users. By linking a store with a user’s email account, the company can now access information relating to that email account, including shopping habits, which can now be used for marketing purposes.

When email launched back in the 1970s, no one could’ve imagined the revolutionary impact on communications this technology would yield. No longer was it necessary to pick up a phone and call someone or put a stamp on an envelope, all you needed was a connection to the internet and an email account. Email has opened a new world of communication with unprecedented power. With so many companies offering free email services, email proves easy to use, merely requiring a smart phone with an internet connection. The effectiveness of email can be attributed to how society has chosen to embrace the technology, with the expectation that users can and will send and respond to messages at any hour of the day. The use of email, combined with mobile phones, has enabled people to work remotely at jobs as they are now able to be kept in the loop on ongoing projects, has eliminated fax machines with email’s ability to send attachments, and provided an easy way to communicate with people in different time zones.

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