

Email has become all-pervasive, as the 'Love Bug' illustrated, but **we still need to talk to each other.**

Exercise your vocal chords



Like most other organisations, PCW fell victim to the 'I love you' virus that recently arrived in almost everyone's mailbox. This little beauty (as virus coders the world over will no doubt call it) caused massive disruption and endless

headaches for computer users everywhere. Luckily it didn't cause too much bother to the PCW team (if it had you probably wouldn't be reading this right now). What amazed me was how widespread the damage was and how quickly it spread. It seemed that everyone I spoke to that day had been affected in some way by the rogue email.

If anything, this incident has proved just how important email is to our everyday lives. Something that was considered a bit of a novelty not too long ago is now a service that few companies or individuals can do without. The fact that everyone relies so greatly on email made it easy for the 'I love you' virus to reach an incredible number of users in next to no time at all. There was a time when companies tried to stop employees from installing their own applications on work PCs for fear of virus infection, but email has made this kind of security measure almost redundant. Add to this the fact that almost anyone who works with a PC also uses some kind of electronic address book, and it's easy to see how viruses these days can spread like, well, viruses.

But surely the benefits of email outweigh the potential risks of attacks like this. The ability to send messages to people on the other side of the world and receive an almost instantaneous response is a very powerful tool. Also, on a personal level, email allows people to keep in touch with distant friends and relatives without incurring prohibitive costs.

However, email isn't always used to communicate with people on the other side of the world, in fact it's often used to communicate with people on the other side of the street, or worse still on the other side of the room. With all the advantages that email has brought, the casualty could well be personal contact. Almost every office in existence will have an email account for

each and every member of staff, moving towards the nirvana of the paperless office. Unfortunately, the ability to send email to the other staff in your office often stops people from taking time out just to talk to each other. Even though I'm aware of this problem I'm still a victim of it. Many a time do I find myself sending an email to one of my staff members only a couple of desks away, when I could just as easily walk over there and talk to them directly. In fact we've taken things a step further, with the majority of the team running the AOL Instant Messenger in the background to allow us to communicate electronically even more efficiently, and thus saving us the effort of using our vocal chords.

Communicating with people outside the office is also becoming an email affair all too often, with the telephone becoming the second point of contact. In fact the old phrase of 'putting a face to the voice' when you meet someone you've spoken to could easily be replaced with 'putting a voice to the email' once you're finally forced to speak to someone directly

The old phrase of 'putting a face to the voice' could be replaced with **PUTTING A VOICE TO THE EMAIL once you finally speak to someone directly**

after communicating electronically.

Even the mobile phone revolution seems to be leaving vocal communication behind. More and more mobile phone users are making use of SMS messaging rather than actually speaking to people, and with the implementation of WAP and mobile email this situation will become more prevalent. That said, at least there's a valid reason for using SMS instead of voice, it's usually cheaper, especially if it's in the middle of the day or if you're abroad.

As with all types of technology, email should be a tool that services us as users, and in many respects it does just that. However, part of the equation should not be the loss of communication skills that have been in place for thousands of years. Email has its place in our work and social lives, but it should be used as a supplement to vocal communication, not a replacement.

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