

Title:

Gmail is Still Beta for a Reason

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Summary:

I think it was the threat of a Gmail revolution that prompted Yahoo to increase the storage space parceled to its free email accounts last year. Who remembers rummaging through our Yahoo email accounts deleting emails only weeks, if not days, old?

Keywords:

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Article Body:

I think it was the threat of a Gmail revolution that prompted Yahoo to increase the storage space parceled to its free email accounts last year. (Yahoo's paid email at the time, of course, gave storage to spare. It's an example of how the whiff of corporate competition can benefit end users or consumers.) Who remembers rummaging through our Yahoo email accounts deleting emails only weeks, if not days, old? I think Yahoo copied their color coded warning system of diminishing storage space from the easy-to-comprehend terror levels issued by the federal government. Gmail's arrival, though, changed this - we were ready for something better. Its search-based organization, something we like to see at ConductSearch.com, figured to be a natural step for email world to take.

I believe that something better came, too. But, something that I'm unlikely to avail myself to because I, like most, am not ready to forego the free, web-based email I am comfortable with for Gmail's blessings.

Gmail, like Google, was marketed beautifully from the outset. How did they manufacture buzz? By attaching a sense of exclusivity to a Gmail address, that's how. That's no small feat considering that Gmail doesn't cost anything. But, they used the invite system and people, exercising the herd mentality as we're wont to do, were all over it. Web geeks were all over Gmail and invites for an address even made it to eBay. I have no doubt Google's marketing department loved that; they might have even put them up for auction themselves.

When the hubbub died down a bit I got mine from a friend who works at Google. I

admit to all (and to Mike) that I felt sheer gratitude for the address. The marketing worked. That's about when the magic ended for me. For starters, it seemed as if Google couldn't let some standard features be, like...freakin' folders!

I had a chat with ConductSearch.com's IT director who, like me, had and disregarded his Gmail account, as did others around the office. The latest numbers show that Gmail accounts handle less than 4% of email volume and I believe this number is generous. The number one reason for discontinuance was forgetting passwords. In other words, there was nothing compelling enough to get a Gmail account and keep it.

I also learned that others, too, didn't like the way Gmail "revolutionized" email. Perhaps this progress was a little forced. Granted, you can go on any techie board and read how people love Gmail, how effective its spam filters are (might have more to do with that Gmail < 4% penetration), how the flow works, etc. Ah, rubbish.

For starters, email is, to me, about communication. And it's a slower form of communication than IM, so I don't need it to be cutting edge, just convenient. I want my email ordered. Before computers, when we were waist high in paperwork (I still am, amazingly) we needed folders and labels. Naturally, as email evolved an organizational system of folders and labels by subject or sender was produced. And, hey, look what else developed - trash cans, just like in real life. Love throwing away that clutter.

Well, Gmail trashed the perfectly good email format where trash cans and folders ease the burdens of Inboxes. Gmail even makes it tough to delete useless email, too. Google intimates that deletion of email is a non-priority because users are given so much storage space. Baloney. It's an irksome element and on some level I think it has something to do with the fact that I'm served text ads in my own inbox. People shouldn't wonder why Gmail is still 'Beta', though some joke that Google forgot to take down that label.

It's not a coincidence; Google took a shot at revamping email as we know it and it didn't work - yet. Unfortunately for Gmail, Instant Messaging has stolen much of their potential thunder and as convergence continues between voice, text, and video - revolutions within a confined space, like email, will not be forthcoming. I do believe, though, that Google has a longer-term plan for Gmail. All the applications that Google develops (admittedly, almost none of it is original or innovative - Google calendar, picture sharing, the free word processing download, to name a few) leads me to believe that Google is trying to integrate an all-involved interactive experience for the web user. I'm pretty

sure that Gmail will someday be seamlessly integrated with instant messaging and document sharing within a Google-server based operating system that will free users from any web-borne virus or malicious hacking. Would be an impressive corporate application, would it not? It explains, to me at least, Google's giant server complex being built on the Columbia River that's been the source of so much speculation.

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