Could companies function without email?

By Daryn Smith

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12 months ago, Thierry Breton, CEO of Atos, which has over 80,000 employees in 42 countries, set out an 18-month plan to ban internal email. Thousands of people from around the world have since commented on this announcement, some supporting it, others not, and many like me who thought it wasn't possible. There are six months left to go on his roll-out plan, and I wonder how things are going.

Initially when it was announced I assumed this meant the organisation would essentially go offline because email and being online can easily be confused as the same thing, but having thought about it, this is certainly not the case. Internet and private network connectivity is still of vital importance, and I'm sure you would find employees killing time in the company canteen should they experience a network outage, as so many companies do from time to time.

I think most people out there feel that they get too many emails; managing an inbox is a full time job, and can consume hours, distracting employees and fostering less focus on core responsibilities.

Adding to the proposition, to ban email is the common excuse. When something is not done, that the person did not receive the email. Maybe it was too big, or got blocked by spam and anti-virus software. This excuse has become too easy - I admit that I have deleted my fair share of email that I did not want to respond to and blamed it on the "techies".

Social collaboration functions

It is possible to ban email though, but it is a strategic move that requires the implementation of systems that include workflow and social collaboration functions, and the enforcement of their use from the highest levels. This is exactly what Atos is doing.

Most finance departments can already operate almost entirely without email, as ERP systems are deployed that have processes and workflow mapped out. An employee simply logs onto the system in the morning, and spends the rest of the day doing their job within the system.

The same goes for support teams, who use ticketing systems that even check a generic mailbox such as support@brand.com for requests and turn them into more manageable tickets.

Sales separments also use CRM systems that could remove a lot of email from a salesperson's inbox. The products available from Salesforce.com are designed for this, with the personality of a salesman in mind, making getting things done very easy.

A range of solutions

When it comes to marketing, organisations are only just beginning to embrace marketing systems - there is a range of marketing automation, marketing operations management and marketing resource management solutions out there, that could not only remove the need for internal email, but also remove the need for email between the plethora of agencies that marketing departments use.

Leaders need to look at new ways for their organisations to communicate - ways that are more efficient and cost effective, and ways that increase collaboration. Email was a huge improvement from sending physical letters and having physical meetings, but the time has come for the next iteration in communication.

ABOUT DARYN SMITH

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