In recent months, the Online Graduate Programs (OGP) at Norwich University have grown large enough that there is significant turnover among the staff. Not only are we adding new staff members periodically, but we also move staff members from one group to another; for example, a staff member may change from being an assistant director in one program to being an administrative director in another. Occasionally we also have staff members who leave the group or even the University altogether.

One of our staff members (the Keeper-of-the-Lists or KL) maintains the list of all of our staff members; however, there is no link between the XL file she maintains and the mailing lists that each member of the OGP must maintain to be able to distribute e-mail to appropriate groups. This afternoon, I noticed that on all-OGP mail message sent by a colleague seemed to have a short distribution list. Sure enough, when I checked the names, I found seven errors: two deletions and five additions. One of the deletions was the name of a staff member who no longer works at the University at all.

Trying to make dozens of people (we currently have 41 staff members) maintain several distribution lists is a hopeless cause: even with the best will in the world, people will inevitably forget to update their lists and therefore

1) Some mailings will miss legitimate recipients;

2) Some people will receive messages they have no business reading.

There are at least four solutions that would rectify this problem.

A) We can use the Yahoo Groups function to define closed groups under the control of the Keeper-of-the-Lists; these provide automatic access to mailing lists [this is an utter kludge and I don't like it because we are putting our faith for continued production application in a free resource completely out of our control].

B) IT can install widely available list-server software to allow the KL to create and maintain specific lists; e.g. OGP-ALL, OGP-DIRECTORS, MSIA-STAFF, MSIA-INSTRUCTORS, etc. that all of us can use as addresses for e-mail.

C) IT can switch all OGP users to any e-mail client that supports exportable mailing lists (e.g., Outlook 2003 because we support the rest of Office 2003). The KL can maintain and distribute updated corporate distribution lists. However, this solution still requires manual intervention by users: everyone has to replace their old list by the new list.

D) IT can implement Microsoft Exchange Server, switch all OGP users to Outlook 2003 and define corporate distribution lists maintained by the KL. All users will automatically access the one and only distribution list for each group without manual intervention.
What do you think? I’ll summarize reader experiences in an upcoming column. If you remember, please use the subject line NWF: LISTS so I can find and collect your messages automatically with a filter (in my Outlook 2003 client).

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