Yahoo Groups Support Appropriate-Use Policies for E-mail

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In my last column, I introduced the issue of segregating private messages from official e-mail. A Yahoo group can provide a perfect mechanism for any organization to segregate personal, non-work-related e-mail from the official e-mail that supports work. Here are some advantages:

* Membership in a Yahoo group is entirely voluntary; no one has to join, so no one has to receive personal messages, jokes, photos and so on if they don’t want to.

* Groups can be defined as entirely private and by invitation only; they won’t even show up to casual visitors if the moderator configures the appropriate settings.

* A group allows every member to specify how to receive or view messages. Some members may want to receive e-mail as soon as it is sent whereas others may prefer to receive daily digests or to visit the Web site to see postings. A related advantage is that people who are highly sensitive to peer pressure can join the group if they feel that it would be rude not to do so and then simply ignore the traffic by never visiting the Web site at all.

* There’s a single e-mail address for everyone in the group and so the mailing list is automatically maintained as members alter their own e-mail address at any time. Old messages with their out-dated CC: or TO: lists are thus no longer a cause of misdirected e-mail. Better yet, no one can carelessly send information to a distribution list based on an old message when the list actually includes inappropriate recipients.

* All the traffic is archived; new members of the group can see previous messages and learn about the corporate culture or identify people they have a lot in common with by reading the old messages. Members also don’t have to copy the previous message in their reply, thus reducing the annoying occurrence of copies of copies of copies (….) in ever-longer and more junk-filled e-mail messages.

* There are places to post pictures and other files for semi-permanent access. People who don’t want the files don’t have to see their e-mail cluttered with megabyte-sized attachments.

* Members can post links to favorite Web pages in a special list.

* One can create a simple directory for various purposes such as recording personal interests or skills (playing musical instruments, sports, movie preferences and so forth).

* There’s an easy method for creating simple polls to gather opinions about specific questions.

* A shared calendar makes it easy to post news of events such as concerts, movie evenings and so on. Members of the group may be able to communicate invitations much more efficiently and less intrusively than by spamming colleagues using official e-mail.
In collaboration with my deans, I plan to establish such a group for the SGS this summer. I am sure that it will provide a much better means of informal communication among our group than using official e-mail.

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