

IF WE'RE AT THE END OF EMAIL, WHAT'S NEXT?

by Ryan Galloway, 14 January 2014

<http://www.workintelligent.ly/information/trends-information/end-of-email-whats-next/>

Recently, we asked [Are We At the End of Email?](#) After all, it can be a woefully unproductive tool for businesses. Not only is it a security nightmare, it's also filled with spam and impossible to organize. It's no wonder that email use peaked in 2008 and has been falling steadily ever since. But despite overwhelming fatigue and frustration from all corners, no clear alternative has emerged.

Until now.

A Challenger Appears

A growing number of companies are becoming just as fed up with email as you probably are. Security is a major concern, as is the productivity lost by dealing with a crush of unwanted emails. These have long been considered acceptable losses; because after all, what choice do you have?

However, recent workforce trends have turned what was once a minor nuisance into a full-blown liability. The rapid moves toward using distributed workforces and replacing full-time employees with freelancers have made email just as slow and ineffective as those old manila "Interoffice Mail" envelopes, tied with red string and covered with a list of crossed-out recipients.

As a result, social intranets are increasingly becoming the primary communication and workflow management solution of choice for many companies. For the uninitiated, social intranets are internal cloud-based collaboration platforms that marry the rapid communication and information sharing capabilities of social media with enterprise-level workflow management tools.

The social intranet solutions already on the market represent a substantial leap forward in business communication, building on the lessons learned from the social media boom, as well as the shortcomings of email in a rapidly evolving business world. However, there still remain significant adoption challenges, as workers slowly transition away from other forms of interoffice communication.

Meet the Contenders

While still very much in their technological infancy, enterprise-focused social intranets are gaining popularity among start-ups and established heavyweights alike.

Enterprise software giant Salesforce has had a toe in the social intranet waters for a while with its Chatter platform. Chatter is a robust communication tool, complete with Facebook-like walls, document sharing, meeting

creation, lead management, and issue resolution capabilities.

Yammer, another industry leader, provides the much of same functionality, though it eschews lead management and issue resolution in favor of other features, like a repository for institutionalized knowledge. Yammer and has already been adopted by companies like Ford, eBay, and DHL.

Likewise, companies such as T-Mobile and Thomson Reuters have turned to Jive. Jive focuses on fast and easy collaboration, giving users the ability to share rich media content, as well as a LinkedIn-like function for locating colleagues with specific skills.

These three contenders dominate the social intranet space for now, but the field is becoming increasingly crowded. As more and more businesses discover the benefits of social intranets, new providers are eager to elbow their way in to the marketplace. Among these are Collaboration Spaces and Hall, which reported having 10,000 enterprise customers in early 2013.

A Long Road Ahead

Social intranets may be the heir apparent to email, but they've still got a long way to go before they completely replace email in enterprise settings. Certainly, social intranets will present difficulties for a number of workers, especially if they are implemented in such a way that the intranet acts as little more than a digital bulletin board that you'd normally find in a breakroom. Forbes' Rawn Shah also has some excellent point-by-point analysis of the hurdles that social intranet platforms will have to overcome before they officially become the Next Big Thing.

Chief among these is urgency, or more specifically, a lack thereof. Many companies have yet to see the benefits of migrating away from email. And since email still works as well as it ever has, there doesn't appear to be a rush to find a better solution.

The shift from email to social intranets is sure be to a gradual one, but it's picking up steam. As companies continue to discover that mobile-friendly, clutter-free collaboration can impact their bottom line, expect to spend less time in your inbox and more time actually getting things done.

What do you think? If workflow processes were baked into upcoming iterations of email programs, would that breathe new life into email?