

Electronic Mail Usage Guidelines

Overview of Electronic Mail system.

Electronic mail is analogous to the postal mail service; where in you just have to put something in the **envelope**; write **from: and to: addresses** what ever you feel like and drop the envelope to any **letter box**. And the letter will reach the destination (**To:**), if it exists, irrespective of what is written in the from address. Incases where TO: address does not exists, the letter is returned to the sender (**from:**), which may or may not exist. Incases of non-existent sender the letter is **dumped as dead letter**. In cases of a valid sender (**from:**) addresses the innocent sender gets a return envelope, which he had never send and is obviously not aware of the contents inside the envelope.

- **Mail Server** is analogous to the **letter box**.
- Any mail composer like **Outlook Express/ MOZILLA/ Pine/ elm/ ANY OTHER Malicious program**, prepares the content along with from: and to: e-mail addresses and posts them to any accessible mail server (letter box).
- Then the e-mail travels over the internet to destination in the same manner as mails are transferred in the POSTAL SYSTEM meets the same fate as in the POSTAL System

Problems Associated with Electronic Mailing System.

The type of problems (like unsolicited business mails) one can visualize in the normal postal system, are there in the electronic mail delivery system. One of such problem called fake/anonymous e-mail are much more in the electronic mailing system, because the computer programs are used to generate these letters, and the sender need not pay any money other than the fixed cost what he pays to his internet service provider. Some people make use of this for their advantage like cheap methods of campaigning, advertising etc.

Electronic Mail Usage Guidelines.

Looking at the pitfalls (like unsolicited business mail, Virus/worm mails, etc.) associated with e-mail delivery system prevalent as of today following precautions may be taken.

(1) CONSUME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE and AS IS WHERE IS BASIS:

E-mail (Electronic Mail) should be presumed as one of the delivery mechanisms available for communications such as telephone, fax. The recipient of the e-mail should ascertain the authenticity of the source through the various means like digital signature verification, a reverse call back to the sender, etc. and then put the desired e-mails to the respective digital file, in case there exists an electronic record management system or hard copy of the e-mail into the normal paper based official filing (record management) system in the similar manner as FAX messages. And remaining mails (SPAM, virus, etc.) are just ignored/ deleted from the e-mail system.

(2) CLEANUP THE MAIL BOX:

To counter the problems associated with virus/worms, which are normally destructive in nature, the recipient of the e-mail should not open any of the attachments enclosed to the e-mail without verifying the authenticity of the sender of the e-mail. Certain viruses/worms become active at the predefined time. They remain silent for rest of the period. Although Anti-Virus tools are normally deployed at the Mail Gateways and Mail Servers, sometimes they become ineffective to a new virus/worm, for which these tools do not have a cure yet. Therefore, it is always recommended to clean up the mailbox so that there is no unwanted e-mail in any of the folder/inbox.

(3) NOT A REPOSITORY FOR RECORDS:

It is recommended not to use the mailbox as the repository for sensitive/useful data. It has been observed that the users keep huge number of files in the mail store as if it is a vaulting facility for their data/communications in electronic form. There may be a time bomb (time triggered destructive virus) sitting inside the mail store to destroy your data at a pre-defined time defined by the virus designer. Also trying to manage/store all the mails sent/received for individual user is analogous to attaching a tape recorder to the telephone instrument and keep recording all the conversations and preserving the tapes. Doing similar management at the mail server level is equivalent to tapping all telephone conversations at the telephone exchange.

Conclusion

The electronic mail system is one of the most useful discoveries/ inventions of the Cyber age and is associated with pitfalls of like magnitude. In this rapidly changing cyber space technology scenario, Mail System Administrators try their level best to keep the systems secure enough so that it is not misused by the hackers. In spite of their (administrators') best effort new virus/worm and spam mails get into the mailboxes of the innocent mail users. The recipient of the e-mail should verify the authenticity/genuineness of the e-mail after receiving, use the e-mail and delete unwanted e-mails from the mailbox. Keeping the virus (so called time-bomb) problems in view the mail store should not be considered as the safe repository for the sensitive/ useful data. Lastly the messaging system (analogous to the dispatch section) should not be confused with the electronic record management system (analogous to the record room) comprising of non-editable / read-only digital files.