
Rick's Place

Notes, Thoughts, and Random Musings on the Online Experience

by Rick Hein, AMIS web master

Then he tiptoed carefully around the inert figure of Miss Trixie, returned to the filing department, picked up the stack of still unfiled material, and threw it in the wastebasket.

John Kennedy Toole
A Confederacy of Dunces

Hands up, everyone who uses E-mail! Good, almost everyone. Hands up everyone who regularly empties their sent E-mail folder and uses rules to sort their mail into organized folders, to ease their archiving tasks. Some confused looks, out there. Is he speaking English? Hands up everyone who doesn't know what I am talking about? That's more like it.

We all have our own filing systems in the real world. Alphabetically tabbed folders, receipts filed in monthly envelopes, tax documents in a separate envelope; bills in the top drawer, catalogs in the middle drawer, everything else in the bottom drawer; January?...that must be on the piano bench...if you get to the Christmas cards you've gone too far. Sadly, the latter is the way most of us deal with our E-mails.

Every mail program has a way of listing by sender, date received, date sent, priority, and the like. All of the programs allow you to create a filing system within the E-mail application. Most of us leave the default folders; in, out and sent and that is it. Our in box has a copy of every E-mail we have ever received. Our sent mail folder has a copy of every E-mail and every attachment we have ever sent. The out box is probably the only empty folder or directory you have.

Ignatius J. Reilly, the central figure of Toole's posthumously published novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*, is a classically trained historian who has a decidedly non-academic method of dealing with filing systems and archive material. We need to use his idea for dealing with archival material, but with a pinch of salt (and sanity)!

In preparing this article I removed 22MB of old E-mails from my mail program. This includes copies of jokes sent, and quick responses to colleagues at school. Given the nature of E-mail, it also included all of the files sent, pictures attached, and forwarded messages. The amount of free space released seems trivial in today's gigabyte world. It is important, though, because the mail program has to expand the amount of memory (RAM) it needs to build its database to keep track of all of these files.

Moving the clutter of mail was simple. On my hard drive I created a new folder and called it 1999 Mail. Then, in the "Sent" folder of my mail program, I selected all of the mail sent in 1999 and simply dragged the messages into the new folder. I then did the same for the mail sent in 2000. We are now ending the first quarter of 2001. My pledge to myself is to empty out that folder quarterly, to keep the mail program nimble, small, and quick.

The running organisation of the messages as they arrive in your in box is a bit easier to undertake. You can create a system of folders in your mail program and then you can define a set of rules that will automatically sort mail into those folders when it comes in to your in box. Amongst the mailboxes I have set up, I currently have an AMIS mail folder and an ACS mail folder. These could also be mail boxes, depending on your mail program. Mail from AMIS goes automatically into the AMIS folder, and E-mails from colleagues at school are automatically placed in the ACS folder. You can create these folders by looking under the "New" command (Mac users, this usually resides in the "File" menu) and choosing "New Folder", You will then see the icon of a folder or mailbox appear with the name already selected so you can give it a name.

To deal with your existing messages, you can probably just select them and drag them into the new folder. Group the message together by finding a common element. From contains, To contains, Subject contains are some of the usual choices. To keep your in box tidy, look for a menu titled "Rules" or "Mail Rules", possibly in the "Tools" menu. Choose "New Rule" and make some rules that will automatically sort your mail into folders. To filter the AMIS messages I chose "From Contains" then typed in bassetts.demon.co.uk. I then defined the action to be taken to when that address appeared to be "Moved" to the "AMIS" folder. Now any mail sent from the Bassetts will be automatically placed in the AMIS folder. A similar choice was made to put mail from acs-england.co.uk into the ACS folder. If you are being plagued by persistent junk mail, you can even have it directed straight to the trash! In Outlook Express, the folders containing unread mail are styled with their names in bold so you will know when they contain unread messages.

Take command of your mail program! Create a logical structure of folders or mailboxes, then empty them regularly. Then take the biggest risk of all and after an appropriate length of time, use the Ignatius J. Reilly filing system and delete the archived messages. You can let go. If you can't, buy some disks, copy the files on to them, then delete them from your hard drive. Then, like me, you'll need to figure out what to do in the real world with all of those disks you are never going to look at again .

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The AMIS website can be found at <http://amis-online.org.uk> or <http://amis-online.org>
