

# Using electronic communications in groups and clubs

## The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

In clubs and organizations we have a need to distribute information to groups of people and the use of personal computers can help make this easier and more efficient. Unfortunately, this can also make things complicated unless we think through what we want to do and choose the best tools to help us.

### What we want to do:

1. Communicate organization information (newsletters and other documents)
2. Maintain lists and contact information for members, officers and committees.
3. Maintain a calendar of events with information about times and places.
4. Facilitate discussion among group members

### Problems we encounter:

1. Incompatible document formats between members
2. Trouble keeping email lists consistent between group members
3. Sending event information via email where information is inconsistent in format, event information gets changed, or email gets deleted or misplaced.
4. The back and forth flow of information depends on who gets copied on each email in the discussion, some people never see the discussion or only see parts of it.

## Solutions

### Incompatible Document Formats

These are usually caused by an attachment that was created by the sender using an application (such as Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel) that the receivers don't have on their computer.

### Solutions:

- The sender can format the document into ".pdf" format before attaching it and sending it. As described in this month's newsletter "The "CutePDFWriter" program can be down-loaded FREE from [www.cutePDF.com](http://www.cutePDF.com) , and is a much less expensive alternative to paying \$600 to \$700 for Adobe "Acrobat" to do the same thing. Installation is easy and fast."

The receivers can then read the file with the standard Acrobat Reader ( see <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>) or with the one of the other “pdf” readers such as the free Foxit Reader from [www.foxitsoftware.com](http://www.foxitsoftware.com).

- The sender can use their Microsoft products, and include the information that people without those products can get the free Viewer software from Microsoft.

The receiver can download free ‘viewer” software for Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Visio, by going to <http://office.microsoft.com> and typing “viewer” in the Search box. Select the Viewer software you want and download it to your computer.

## Email Lists

When individuals maintain email lists on their individual email system, it can be very difficult to keep these lists up-to-date and accurate. You may start out with identical lists on several different people’s computers, but over time they may become different because updates/changes to email addresses may not get made to each person’s email list and typographical errors can creep in.

### Solution - Individual Email List

Assign one person in the group to distribution of information (they maintain the “master list” on their email system).

### Solutions - Centralized Email List

Use a Centralized Email List residing on a publically accessible email server. There are many of these available, both free email list systems and fee-based email list systems.

These can be free email lists, such as Yahoo Groups or Google Groups, or commercial services such as Constant Contac (which is used by TVCUG). The common characteristic is that only one email list exists (hosted on a server on the Internet).

#### Yahoo Groups –

- See <http://groups.yahoo.com>
- Maintains list of members’ email addresses
- Moderator settings and management tools
- Members can email to one address – i.e. [bcaat@yahoogroups.com](mailto:bcaat@yahoogroups.com)
- Basic group info. (Web page)
- Group Calendar and management tools
- Message retention
- Discussion group
- File and photos storage online

## **Google Groups – (new version currently in beta testing)**

- See <http://groups.google.com>
- Maintains list of members' email addresses
- Moderator settings and management tools
- Members can email to one address – i.e. [bcaat@yahoogroups.com](mailto:bcaat@yahoogroups.com)
- Basic group info. (Web page)
- Group Calendar feature - not as well integrated as Yahoo but can be inserted into your Web site. See [www.hoatv.org](http://www.hoatv.org) and click on "Calendar" in the left column.
- Message retention
- Discussion group
- File and photos storage online

## **Commercial Groups – (such as Constant Contact or My Emma)**

- See [www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com) or <http://www.myemma.com>
- Works well for newsletters and email promotions
- Contains Members' email addresses and has maintenance tools
- Email tracking and reporting (bounces, who opened the email, etc.)
- Free 60 day trial (\$15 a month for 0-500 addresses, \$30 for 501-2500, etc.)
- Pre-formatted email formats, like the one used for TVCUG newsletter
- Useful for newsletters and periodic reports but not for spontaneous emails.

## **Hosted Email list, usually associated with your Web Site.**

- Requires a hosted service (monthly or annual fee) and is usually offered with a custom Web site.
- Uses a "listserver" approach and may not have easy tools for list management. May not give any feedback on "bounces".
- Depending on your website's hosting service, your mass emails may get blocked as SPAM by them or by your recipients email server.