



## Dangers of Mass and Chain E-mails



First of all, what is a mass e-mail? It is an e-mail sent to multiple parties. What is a chain e-mail? It's a mass e-mail (usually) that includes a multitude of non-business related subject matter, such as jokes or cute sayings and requests you like to forward to everyone you know. What's the danger? Let me explain.

All of us have seen them, e-mails with a multitude of people in the "To" box. These e-mails are becoming more common among contracting professionals. This article

"Speaking Out" is an opportunity for you to express your opinion—perhaps in the form of a challenge to the federal acquisition system, a criticism, a pat on the back, whatever. Send your manuscript to the editor or [cm@ncmahq.org](mailto:cm@ncmahq.org). Views expressed in this column are those of the contributor and do not necessarily reflect the position of NCMA. Articles may be edited for brevity and clarity.

is merely designed to provide some things to think about, some cautions to those who use the subject media. You may be thinking, "What's the big deal?" I'm just trying to get information to a bunch of folks. There are two main "big deals"—security and courtesy. Keep in mind: e-mail addresses are like phone numbers. Some are listed, some aren't. Most people give their e-mail address only to duty acquaintances, friends, or family. Some persons do not give you their e-mail to in turn give it to other persons whom they don't know. When you send a mass e-mail, you have just given the e-mail addresses of everybody in the "To" or "Cc" box to everyone else in those boxes. In other words, you may have betrayed their trust. Before sending that mass e-mail, ask yourself some questions.

- (1) Have all persons in your "To" and "Cc" boxes already given their e-mail addresses to everyone else thereon? Or, have they specifically authorized you to mass e-mail their address? For example, I give my e-mail to friends and family to pass on information of personal importance (photos, etc.). Also, closer to home within the NCMA, I have provided an e-mail address for NCMA member use within my chapter's newsletter and member Web pages. As the chapter Webmaster, it is okay for my e-mail address to be openly available to potential members as well.
- (2) If sending to a duty e-mail address, is it duty-related? Many server administrators within the recipient's workplace take a dim view of non-duty related e-mails tying up server space. I would consider NCMA-related e-mails duty related, since such e-mails are normally designed to provide information that may help contracting professionals or those who work with them.
- (3) If sending a personal e-mail, does it include information as to what is happening with you and/or your immediate family? I prefer to receive this information from my friends and family, rather than the chain e-mail fare.

I'll admit it is very easy to forward that cute saying, joke, or the like after receiving it from some other well-meaning person without any kind of family update.

Be careful of the dishonest recipient. This person may use an anonymous e-mail address to send you unsolicited e-mail (also known as "spam"). If you were to try to reply to the "spammer" to ask to be removed from his list, you would most likely get an "invalid receiver error" from your e-mail program. This means you may continue to get e-mails from this person until the authorities catch up with this person. Of course, that might take some time.

- (4) Does the e-mail include an attachment and, if so, are you 100 percent sure it is virus-free? Be mindful—anti-virus updates occur only *after* the maliciousness is known. Perhaps, you remember the "ILoveYou" and "Melissa" viruses.

If the answer to any of these questions is "no" or if you have any doubts, I recommend you *not* send that mass or chain e-mail. But, is there a way I can send important information to the those who need it without revealing others' e-mail addresses? Yes, there is. Instead of using the "To" or "Cc" boxes, you should use the "Bcc" box. Using the "Bcc" box will help keep the identity of the other receivers unknown. Some e-mail programs may require you to have an e-mail address in the "To" box. If that's the case, all you have to do is put your address there.

In conclusion, I would recommend you use the "Bcc" method for all mass e-mails unless you were absolutely sure all receiving parties approved the publishing of their e-mail addresses to all others. After all, that would be the most courteous and, more importantly, security-conscious thing to do. **CM**

#### About the Author

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Each year, the Procurement Round Table, in cooperation with the Federal Acquisition Council, awards \$5,000 to a young federal acquisition professional, who has contributed significantly to acquisition operations or acquisition policy:

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Nominations must be submitted for the 2004 award by January 30, 2004.

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