

# Incoming!

Oasys' Mail Manager addresses those parts of Outlook that fall short of providing a full communication tool for the modern company

**W**hat exactly is Oasys' Mail manager? Where does it fit into the architectural practice software portfolio? Is it just an extension of Microsoft Outlook, or is it a tool that rationalises and sorts out Outlook's shortcomings, producing a useful tool for architects - and any other organisation - in the process?

Mail Manager was developed by Arup's software division, Oasys, to solve some basic problems in Outlook, and to address how people conceived of and used the software. A large majority of workplace communications are now handled by email. People rarely send letters. Outlook, and similar packages are therefore the main conduit into and out of a company for correspondence, and their attachments - drawings, reports, spreadsheets - and the rest of the paraphernalia of business life.

It is pretty vital then that Outlook operates efficiently. It's hardly a bottleneck, though, as stuff is coming in across the broad width of the enterprise - in everybody's inboxes.

And, by and large, there it stays!

There is no capacity to automatically re-route emails to all parties who would want to read it, project team members and so on - and there is no means of searching the company web, to find and pick up emails that have been addressed to anyone else, and that you may also wish to read. So, a project manager can shoot off on holiday, and all vitally important communications regarding the project remain dormant in his Inbox until he returns!

Mail Manager eradicates this problem entirely by storing all emails in one location, making them available to everyone, and filing them in a structured manner, so that they can be searched properly.

Of course, it implies that there has to be some sort of agreement on where and how to file emails, what to file with them, and what indexing arrangements have to be made, so that they can be recovered - but that is a 'sine qua non' of any

company that wants to rationalise its internal administration.

It was this search for concurrence on how to solve a pressing problem that brought about the package itself. Arup is a global concern, with offices stretching between Newcastle, Moscow, Perth and all points in between. All the main offices attempted to sort out their communication and email problems - caused by the mass of communications flying between them - in their own way, coming up with similar, but slightly different, solutions.

With the help of Oasys, they put their heads together and developed Mail Manager - a solution, they discovered, that would not only sort out their own difficulties, but would also be relevant to any company, in any field, with similar problems.

Outlook also has size limitations, storing every scrap of information in one single file - which, as I know only too well, soon clogs up the system if emails are not regularly archived. And where does the archived material end up? It makes sense to have a single repository of all data, size unlimited. Searching for emails is difficult within a distributed Outlook system, as well. Searching for them once they have been transferred to a separate filing system, to stop them clogging up the system, is impossible! Mail Manager allows users to store files with unique file names, with or without attachments (which can even be stored separately, with links to its original email).

Mail Manager is integrated within Outlook. It attaches a new toolbar for filing, searching for, and reviewing emails - and, of course, admin tools. As emails are filed, the user has the option of creating new filing locations, or using those already created. To find emails, clicking on the Search Icon on the Mail Manager tool bar allows users to search the Filing Location List. Multiple folders can be searched using the Shift and Ctrl keys.

If the email is not in the Filing Locations, the

browse function can be used to search all folders on the system, retrieving all files in particular folders, or only those containing specified text or other parameters (dates etc.) producing a results dialogue, where any file can be highlighted and viewed in a preview page.

Mail manager has a very useful function that cuts out printing emails and having them manually signed off. Instead, emails can be electronically signed off by every intended recipient as 'reviewed' and understood. It also has a 'Notify Participants' function that allows users to keep a master copy on file, and invite people to read it and mark it as reviewed. Users merely select 'Notify Participants', previously grouped, and when the message is stored an email is sent to them, containing hyperlinks to the document.

Finally, task requests can be assigned to messages, so that users can type in task instructions, which will automatically create an Outlook Task containing your instructions, with hyperlinks to all associated files and attachments.

A useful tool? Certainly. I have fitted it into my workflow, and I don't even have to bother about other users, as I am not on a network. But besides providing the benefits listed above it has provided something that I was sorely lacking - namely the rationalisation of my email system!

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