

# **E-Mail - Killer Application for the '90s**

*By*

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Word processing and spreadsheets were the “killer applications of the eighties”.

E-mail is the “killer application of the nineties”. E-mail is also becoming the electronic smoking gun of the eighties, nineties . . . as evidenced by the recent unveiling of Bill Gate’s e-mail in the Microsoft antitrust trial.

In one of the most prophetic writings of the 1980’s John Naisbitt in his book Mega trends forecasted the huge impact of electronic e-mail and telecommunications by referring to it as the “collapsing the information float”.

The pace of change will accelerate even more as communications technology collapses the information float. The life channel of the information age is communication. In simple terms, communication requires a sender, a receiver and a communication channel. The introduction of increasingly sophisticated information technology has revolutionized that simple process. The net effect is a faster flow of information through the information channel.

With the phenomenal emergence of the Internet the information communication channel has become commonplace. E-mail is the most used and popular way to communicate through the Internet. E-mail is used to send messages and attached computer files to other Internet users. After the e-mail is delivered the recipient can reply to the e-mail and also attach files for its return journey. The same message can be addressed to multiple recipients for fast and time saving distribution. You can send a message to anyone, anywhere, anytime, almost instantaneously, if both parties have access to the Internet. You can exchange e-mail with millions of people all over the world.

The uses of e-mail are endless. An e-mail connection can support many attorney-client functions and solidify an existing relationship. With e-mail it can assist with:

- Joint document drafting;
- Legal discussion groups;
- Exchanging documents;
- Accessing billing tasks and costs;
- Avoiding telephone tag and other inefficiencies;
- Shared work product retrieval;
- Distributing information of importance to clients;
- Exchanging messages; and
- Shared case management plans and timetable.

With colleagues one can share ideas, pleadings, work product, personal information quickly and efficiently. E-mail is the primary method for participating in discussion groups with colleagues on the Internet such as listservs. A LISTSERV(mailing list) uses standard Internet e-mail to exchange messages. In effect, when you subscribe to a LISTSERV you are adding your name to a mailing list. When a user sends a message it is automatically sent to everyone in the group. A LISTSERV is a good way to keep current in your legal specialty area. There are LISTSERV discussion groups’ for real estate, probate, litigation, immigration, etc.

Yet we still see a reluctance of some legal professionals to use e-mail in their practices. In the ABA's 1998 small firm survey only 52% of attorneys use external e-mail. However, it is reported that 97% of attorneys in large firms use e-mail.

E-mail Addresses contain the name and location protocol where the mail will be sent. They have a user's name, the @ sign, the name of the user's domain or computer, a period and the type of organization. For example my e-mail address is Michael@Arkfeld.com. The user's name is Michael, the @ sign, the user's domain or computer is Arkfeld and the .com stands for commercial.

When you sign up with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) they generally provide you with the last part of your e-mail address. For example if you sign up for America Online the e-mail address would be [username@aol.com](mailto:username@aol.com).

The State Bar of Arizona offers an easy to use service that enables an attorney to use the domain name azbar.org permanently and for no cost. For example an e-mail name that I could use is [Michael.Arkfeld@azbar.org](mailto:Michael.Arkfeld@azbar.org) and the State Bar would forward my mail to my Internet address. So anytime, you change ISP's your e-mail address stays the same. This enables one to use the State Bar address on their business cards, letterhead, etc. without worrying about changing your e-mail address when you switch ISP's. To find out more information about the azbar.org e-mail forwarding address visit their web site at [www.azbar.org](http://www.azbar.org).

Another way having a permanent e-mail address is to get your own domain name. Besides identifying your address on the web a domain name can be used as your e-mail address. For example if your domain name is crimlaw.com then your e-mail address can be Smith@crimlaw.com. If you switch ISP's then your domain name and e-mail address will follow you to the new ISP. Check with an ISP on how to obtain your own domain and e-mail name.

Features and Products. Features to look for in an Internet e-mail program:

- Automatically checks for e-mail at scheduled intervals while you are performing another task on-line
- Filtering features to prioritize your mail;
- Address book to keep e-mail addresses;
  - Return receipt that is sent back to sender
  - Distribution mail lists for groups of users;
  - Templates available for repetitive responses;
  - Folders for organizing your e-mail; and
  - Encryption features.

There are several graphical e-mail software programs available. Eudora Pro 3.0™ by Qualcomm is the web's most popular e-mail client. The lite version is free. It can be downloaded at [www.qualcomm.com](http://www.qualcomm.com) or [www.eudora.com](http://www.eudora.com) The Netscape Communicator™ program includes an e-mail software program. ([www.netscape.com](http://www.netscape.com)) as does the Internet Explorer™ with a module called Outlook Express™ ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)).

In the not too distant future a permanent e-mail address will be required by the courts and State Bar similar to the present requirement of having a permanent mailing address. The implementation of electronic filing and delivery of court orders will mandate a permanent e-mail address. It is imperative that one connects onto the information highway with e-mail or otherwise it may be the killer application to your legal practice.

