

At world's top IT fair, firms mull death of email

7 March 2013, by Marie Julien



Photo illustration of a woman using email. At the CeBIT, the world's biggest high-tech fair, in the northern German city of Hanover, some firms are considering doing away with email.

At the CeBIT in Germany, the world's biggest high-tech fair, some firms say they are looking at doing away with email to increase productivity.

Studies show that workers spend nearly a third of their day sorting through emails, prompting some companies to think again.

The French firm Atos, for example, plans to shift its internal communications onto a Facebook-style social [networking platform](#) by 2014.

Displaying its "Zero Email" system in Hanover, Atos, led by former French finance minister Thierry Breton, has said it wants to rid society of emails.

Breton has even compared the project to "reducing environmental pollution after the [industrial revolution](#)".

Atos project leader Robert Shaw told AFP the firm was "on track in moving our organisation towards a

collaborative work environment not based on emails by 2014."

There are "already more than 20,000 staff" on the internal "BlueKiwi" system, explained Shaw.

The most committed ones "do not use internal emails any more, since they collaborate together and get their work done in a more enjoyable and effective way," he added.



AILA, or Artificial Intelligence Lightweight Android, presses switches at the CeBIT technology trade fair on March 5, 2013 in Germany. CeBIT is the world's biggest high-tech fair.

Atos believes that by changing the way staff communicate with each other internally, a firm's productivity could be boosted by as much as 20 percent.

This chimes with a study carried out by the US consulting firm McKinsey which showed that the average office worker spent around 28 percent of their time reading, writing and sorting tens or hundreds of emails each day.

Atos is not the only firm trying to deal with what many regard as the plague of emails.

Lanvin, Deloitte and Intel have all tried to instigate "email-free days".

Some individuals have taken it upon themselves to do away with the flood of electronic messages, like Luis Suarez, in charge of promoting "business 2.0" at US computing giant IBM, who has scarcely used email for the past five years.

"It's not collaborative enough, it's not open enough, it's not transparent enough," complained Suarez in a recent video post, acknowledging however that it would take a long process of education to wean people off email.

Dieter Kempf, head of German high-tech lobby group BITKOM, told AFP that although he was among those irritated by the flood of daily emails, he acknowledged that they have greatly improved communication within society.

"I think we can learn a lot from [social networking](#) technology to create different communication forms within a company," said Kempf.

Using systems similar to Facebook or Twitter, employees can share ideas, tell others what they are working on in real time, transfer documents or ask questions, without having to send emails copied to dozens of colleagues.

"You want to get rid of [email](#)? Good luck with that," smiles Tom Reuner, an IT analyst at British firm Ovum.

"This could only happen at an internal level (of a company)," he noted.

"You may be able to change the behaviour of your own employees but how do you deal with suppliers, the external side?"

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