

## Against the Grain

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# Drinking from the Firehose / The Bulging File Cabinet

Eleanor I. Cook

*Appalachian State University*

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# Drinking from the Firehose

**The Bulging File Cabinet : Breaking Old Habits When You Go Electronic**  
by **Eleanor I. Cook** (Serials Librarian, Appalachian State University,  
Boone, NC 28608 COOKEI@CONRAD.APPSTATE.EDU)



I confess I'm a "messy office" person. Mine is not the most cluttered ever encountered; I've seen much worse. No mushrooms grow in the corner and I boast no dead plants — in fact — I love and respect plants, so none are allowed to attempt survival in my hovel. I am, however, wallowing in paper: memos, vendor reports, sample issues, advertisements, catalogs, a burgeoning (and depressing) backlog of new journal requests, more memos, reports, etc. I yearn for a tidy cubbyhole. I keep vowing to come in one Saturday morning and have at it. Unfortunately, Saturdays come an go; as each one arrives I lose my resolve, sleep late and then spend the rest of the weekend catching up with the laundry or the garden or anything but that noble office clean-up project that is so far down on the list. Everything else gets higher priority.

Last year, in order to save space, I moved the filing cabinet out of my office. This was a significant symbolic gesture. Even though my desk, the floor and the shelves are piled with papers, I rarely use that filing cabinet. Much of the stuff piled around me could be organized better (or thrown away), but not much of it would end up in that filing cabinet even if I did clean up. What's in the filing cabinet now is mostly from years past and most of it could be thrown out too — if I ever got around to it.

What does this have to do with e-mail? Well, I have a theory, and it's just that, nothing scientific mind you, that most of us with cluttered work spaces probably have a heck of a time keeping the electronic stuff under control as well.

Of course, some people do not have to worry about messy electronic space because they do not have much to work with. If your account has limited space, then of course you **MUST** do something with all those messages or else someone will do it for you. Some people think, hey, I'll just print out the messages I want to keep and stick them in file folders by topic — no problem! This technique gets out of hand fairly fast; before you know it, you have dozens of file folders bulging with fading printouts and

your office starts looking like mine. Another technique is to move items of interest to electronic file folders. Most e-mail systems have this feature. As long as you keep your main directory in decent shape, the computer center might not hassle you. However, before long you have as many electronic file folders as you did in paper form!

Now what? You could try moving the significant messages to floppy disk — remote, compact storage, as it were. I was convinced that this would solve all my problems. The first time I achieve this feat I was exuberant. However, I quickly discovered how much work it was and how much time it took. In the system I use, several steps are required to transfer a single message from the mainframe to my PC. At one message at a time, this is a consuming task.

The next level of enlightenment occurs when you realize that perhaps you do not need to keep these messages AT ALL. Or at least not forever. Retaining bulletin board messages is usually unnecessary because they can be accessed through the forum's own index or one of the other indexing devices available via the Internet. Try using these indexing tools and then you'll have the confidence to delete all those postings you thought you **MIGHT** need someday.

For some people, deleting personal messages are the most difficult. Even though you may be paranoid about someone peering in your account, it's still tempting to store away those warm, chatty missives from a close colleague. It's like tossing out a letter or postcard from a friend; some people never discard personal letters and cherish them forever.

E-mail folders are not your scrapbook or bottom drawer; if you don't clean out those files, they may end up in the university archives someday. A while ago I bit the bullet and deleted about a year's worth of correspondence from a colleague I had worked closely with on a several professional projects. Reading back through the messages was pleasurable and touching; the growth of the friendship was evident. However, the

projects were now complete and the messages were not longer needed. I hit the delete key, but with reluctance.

I find myself facing a similar dilemma with e-mail correspondence related to committee work. Sifting through the various back and forth, I find it tough sometimes to know what I should save for the official record and what might be useful to the incoming chair.

Newsletters and e-journals are another matter. How many partial or complete backruns of *Acqnet* and *Newsletter for Serials Pricing Issues* are lounging around in various niches of disk space? It's similar to having your own subscription to *Library Resources and Technical Services* sitting on the office shelf. Plenty of people prefer to have their own copies of journals nearby, even if they never look at them again. Even though it's not necessary for all of us to keep our own copies, we do, mostly because we are natural collectors of things. What IS important about these formal kinds of publications is that there needs to be a place (or places) where we can be **SURE** someone is keeping them forever. There was an interesting discussion on this topic recently on the VPIE-Journal list. (This is a list from Virginia Tech that addresses issues related to electronic publications.) A nationally coordinated effort needs to be formulated and alternatives are being explored. And guess what? I have the entire discussion in an electronic file folder, just in case I need it. (I'm great at giving advice, but not so great at following it!)

One final important point to realize is that your e-mail account is run through some kind of software to give it extra features and let you edit more easily, etc. There are many different ways to do this, depending on the hardware platform and the communication configura-

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## Legally Speaking

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not generally the nature of our publisher and author associations. Still, there is an intriguing practicality to the idea of collective distribution. It may offend certain of our individualistic and capitalistic values, but could it be that some curtailment of those values would be in the best interests of society and scholarly communication?

One final note about Kopinor: Norwegian educational institutions are subject to Kopinor licensing procedures. Fair use, to whatever extent it exists in Norway, does not cover educational copying the way that it does in the U.S. Indeed, uncompensated use in the educational sector was the primary target of the "Extended Collective Agreement License" at the time of its passage into law.

The Norwegian model, while admit-

tedly not easily transferable to the U.S. system, provides some interesting alternatives to certain aspects of the U.S. approach to copyright. It grew out of a recognition on the part of Norwegian government officials, publishers, authors, *et al*, that too much uncompensated copying was being done, but that a system of purely individual rights and permissions would be cumbersome and inefficient. These are some of the very problems being faced in the U.S. today. Whether technology, the CCC, or other factors can come together to solve these problems without compromising our individualistic (market-based?) system to copyright remains to be seen. As we continue to assess the situation, we should not close our minds to some of the alternative approaches practiced elsewhere. Kopinor, through its use of statutory licenses and collective distribution, is a model worth studying. ☞

## Gilles de La Rochefoucauld

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just finished Felicien Marceau's *La Terrasse de Lucrezia*. It is fiction, an at times humorous story of a woman living in Italy as a concierge and the story is about all the people that live in the apartment building.

**ATG:** What does the future hold for AAL?

**GLR:** There is a very common proverb in France. It is "don't give up prey to chase a shadow." Our main market is the American market and we want to work hard to please that market. We believe that the dollar is undervalued compared to the European currencies. Obviously, we want to capture market share against our competitors. There is no question that it is easier to get French titles from a French bookseller. We have recently hired a representative in the United States. **Edna Laughrey** will represent AAL abroad. We are anxious to know what our customers think and we are always working to improve. ☞

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tion. Profs, CC: Mail, All-in-One, Vax-Mail, In-Box are some of the names you may have heard of. They are all different and some are easier to use than others. Be aware that whatever you are using may not be the only thing available at your institution or work place. Ask your systems people what the choices are and maybe you'll find one you like better. Where I work there are at least two different e-mail set-ups and some people prefer one over the other; some people despise both of them, and others don't even know the difference!

Meanwhile, the next piece of furniture that I suspect will leave my office will be my desk. That big, clunky piece of government-issued walnut-veneer has never been anything except a place to pile papers on anyway. If the sleek, functional computer table I requested ever gets ordered, the boxy old desk can go! ☞