

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

- In Australia, DFAT maintains a separate cabling system for official communications, with pre-programmed distribution of messages to addressees in Canberra and elsewhere based on prior discussion among stakeholders. Messages are numbered and tagged to ensure effective distribution and filing. "All tasking, policy guidance and reporting transmitted between Canberra and posts should be strictly by cable". E-mail is to be used "for the transmission of documents and drafts, for forwarding official correspondence between individuals (for example on personnel matters), and for more informal work-related communication between officers as might have hitherto been carried out by telephone". These disciplines are designed to enhance visibility and accountability. "Too often managers at either end are not aware of tasking and advice that has been transmitted between their subordinates. Also officers in other Branches and Divisions with an operational need to know are often left out of the loop."
- The German foreign ministry requires that a senior officer at headquarters or an ambassador at post sign all messages of instruction, which are marked as "instruction".
- CIDA uses an intranet facility called "Entre Nous" to post agency-wide messages, reducing the clutter of the regular e-mail system. Only very important messages are broadcast, but these are generally short and refer back to the intranet site which employees are responsible for reviewing regularly. The site is structured so that individuals can select the features and messages most relevant to their own concerns e.g. non-rotational employees can ignore messages intended for rotational staff.
- In the Foreign Policy and Defence secretariat at PCO, a simple but effective electronic file management system ensures that a complete record is kept of all documentation related to foreign or defence policy which engages the Prime Minister or the Cabinet. Records are organized to permit rapid retrieval of data in the form required, and are accessible by all those who might be tasked to work with them -- whether the officer responsible or an associate substituting in the individual's absence. The system was developed in collaboration with the officers involved, an administrative assistant goes into the system every quarter to archive inactive materials, and divisional secretaries understand that information management is an important dimension of their responsibilities.