Bits & Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

January 2025

The Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center
Highlands Crossing Center, 1801 Forest Hills Blvd Suite 208 (lower level), Bella Vista, AR 72715

Website: http://BVComputerClub.org   Email: editor@bvcomputerclub.org

MEETINGS

Board Meeting: January 13, 2pm, in John Ruehle Training Center, Highlands Crossing Center.

General Meeting: January 13, 3pm. Program: "Email": Why is this oldest form of digital communicatiion still in use; how is it accessed; and how can it be managed using folders and rules/filters.

 We will meet in-person in John Ruehle Training Center, Highlands Crossing Center, lower level, 1801 Forest Hills Blvd, Bella Vista, or you may attend the meeting on-line via Zoom. Zoom access information is published on our website.

Visitors or Guests are welcome.

Consider attending by Zoom if you are unable to attend in-person.

HELP CLINICS

January 4, 9am - noon at John Ruehle center
January 15, 9am - noon at John Ruehle center
Members may request Remote Help on our website at https://bvcomputerclub.org at menu path Member Benefits ► Remote Help .

MEMBERSHIP

Single membership is $30; $15 for each additional family member in the same household.

Join on our website at https://bvcomputerclub.org at menu path Get Involved ► Join/Renew, by mailing an application (from the web site) with check, or complete an application and pay in person at any meeting.

CLASSES

(At BVCC Training Center)

Tuesday, January 14, 9am-11am, "Why, When and How to Backup Your C Drive", with Pete Opland.

Wednesday January 22, 9am-11am, "Storage Solutions", with Pete Opland.

Advance sign up required for each listed class: For reservations: email to edu@bvcomputerclub.org, or sign up at the General Meeting. Classes are free to Computer Club members.

Check the monthly calendar and announcements for any last minute schedule changes at https://bvcomputerclub.org .

NEW OR RETURNING BVCC MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the following new members or members returning as BVCC members after an absence:

Diane Patrick	Joan Watkins	Ann Gray
Efren Rodriguez	Michael Henning	Paul Meyer
Chuck Seeley		

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE REGULATION

By Joel Ewing
President (at) bvcomputerclub.org
Bits & Bytes, January 2025

In October 2022 the White House published a "Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights"[1], but the United States still does not have any national regulation of Artificial Intelligence (AI). A number of States have enacted a patchwork of State laws relating to AI deployment, starting with Illinois in 2019. As of June 2024 there were only 16 States that did not either have some AI legislation approved or proposed.[2] That count includes laws regulating automated decision-making.   Although not all automated decision making involves AI, the integration of these areas is increasing. The inconsistencies from State to State and frequent changes in State laws create a complicated environment for AI companies that wish to be compliant, as well as opportunities to evade restrictions of specific States.

The US Federal government lags behind the European Union (EU) in digital regulation in general.   The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protecting the privacy and security of digital data collected on EU citizens has been in effect since May 2018. Although this EU law much more stringent than US privacy law, the GDPR has become the *de facto* standard for many US companies because they either have European customers, or they have an Internet presence that can be accessed by European citizens.

The European Parliament in 2024 approved an Artificial Intelligence Act[3] which became effective on August 1, 2024. This law is designed to regulate AI systems: to focus on risk management and and ensure that AI systems do not compromise human rights or safety.   Like the broader effects of the GDPR outside the European Union, the AI Act can be expected to affect US companies that produce products with an AI component, if those products are made available within the European Union.

The AI Act categorizes AI usage by risk as follows:

Minimal Risk
No special obligations   AI applications are still expected to comply with existing laws, such as copyright law.

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1   https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Blueprint-for-an-AI-Bill-of-Rights.pdf

2   https://www.bclplaw.com/en-US/events-insights-news/us-state-by-state-artificial-intelligence-legislation-snapshot.html

3   Some of the specifics of the EU AI Act are from "The EU AI Act and the Wager on Trustworthy AI", Communications of the ACM, Dec 2024, Vol 87 No 12, pp 58-65.

Limited Risk

Transparency that AI has been used is required. Includes bio-metric categorization into a group that might justify an action, emotion recognition, and deep-fake systems. I interpret this as not allowing use of deep-fake AI that is not advertised as AI-generated.

High Risk

Regulated AI Systems. These have to adhere to risk-mitigation requirements, documentation, data safeguards, transparency that allows humans to understand the decision-making process, and human oversight. There must be a human in the loop to make decisions that have significant consequences for individuals' rights and safety.   So, a high-risk AI system without a human in the decision loop is prohibited.

Unacceptable Risk

Prohibited AI practices. This includes AI systems that do social scoring, subliminal techniques, bio-metric ID in public places, and exploiting of personal vulnerabilities -- with some exceptions in special cases for law enforcement and national security.

Summary

The goal of the AI Act was to prioritize the well-being of individuals and society as a whole, based on the principles in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (human dignity, equality, justice and equity, non-discrimination, informed consent, private and family life, and data protections); and the principles and values of [European] Union law.

It would simplify AI development in the US if there were consistent national requirements rather than 50 different State standards.   It is questionable whether that is possible in the current environment where major political groups are both ideologically opposed to regulations in general and discredit expert advice.

What's unclear at this early stage is whether in practice AI applications will be properly categorized in the correct risk category. It's also unclear how well human monitoring of high-risk applications will work long-term.   If an AI system is right 99% of the time, will a human monitor become complacent and start to miss the 1% where it's wrong, and if that happens, who is liable for damages done.

WINDOWS MAIL APP OFFICIALLY DEAD

By Joel Ewing
President (at) bvcomputerclub.org
Bits & Bytes, January 2025

How many have used , or are still trying to use, the old free Email client app named "Mail" on Windows? As of December 31, 2024 the old "Mail" app is supposed to be dead -- no longer able to send or receive new Emails, although supposedly it is still possible to export data from the old application.

For several months, starting "Mail" on Windows 10 or 11 has been giving a warning that "Support for Windows Mail, Calendar, and People will end on December 31, 2024" and encouraging you to "Try the new Outlook". In the past it was possible to dismiss the warning and continue with Mail. Now you may be forced to try the new Outlook, in which case your data from Windows Mail and Calendar are carried over into the new Outlook app.

The new replacement free Email client "new Outlook" might be more accurately described as "Windows Outlook". This is a highly confusing name choice because this app is currently different and distinct from the Outlook component of the desktop Microsoft Office or the Outlook component of the web-based Microsoft Office, now called Microsoft 365.

On a system which has a desktop version of MS Office installed, the MS Office Outlook is listed as "Outlook (classic)" and the new free Email client is listed as "Outlook (new)". The new Outlook navigation bar has icons for Word, Excel, and PowerPoint; but these take you to the web-based versions. If you have a version of desktop MS Office installed, presumably you would want to use the desktop versions, not the web-based ones.   With MS Office 2024, where Outlook becomes a significant-cost add-on, not part of the base, you might have to deal with the confusion of using both MS Office 2024 and the new Outlook, which attempts to steer you to the web-based counterparts.

Some find this new Outlook an improvement over Mail, but it has also been criticized for having flaws and missing features. Some have described it as being similar to the web-based Microsoft 365 Outlook minus some important features, but being able to access remote email services outside of Microsoft.

Supposedly the long-term goal is to enhance the new Windows Outlook app over a period of several years until it can eventually replace the version of Outlook in Microsoft 365. In the meantime it sounds like those that elect to go with the "new Outlook" will have to live with the inconvenience of change and serve as testers for several years as the product matures. One would hope that this app will continue to be free as part of Windows after it replaces the Outlook in Microsoft 365, but I haven't seen any official statements about this.

If you find the "new Outlook" unsatisfactory, this might be the time to take a look at some of the other free Email clients that are available, like Thunderbird.

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9 REASONS EMAIL IS WONDERFUL
REALLY. IF YOU DON'T AGREE, YOU MAY BE USING IT WRONG.

by Leo A. Notenboom
https://askleo.com/email-is-wonderful/

> Some say that email is dead. My take is completely opposite: email is one of our most effective communication methods.

There are so many ways to communicate these days it just boggles the mind.

What was once limited to postal mail and (landline) telephone calls has blossomed to include instant messages and chat, store-and-forward audio and video messages, text messages, video call services, Zoom and its competitors, and more.

I use all of those from time to time as situations warrant. But I keep coming back to a tried and true communication mechanism that works the best for me for so many different reasons.

I keep coming back to email.

> # Email is great
> Email isn't dead. It remains a flexible, effective communication tool. It gives you time to think, preserves context, doesn't interrupt, and can be managed efficiently with things like inbox rules and decluttering. Newer generations might favor alternatives, but email remains indispensable for professional communication and tasks requiring clarity, record-keeping, and reliability.

1. Email lets me think

This by far the most important reason I gravitate to email as my communication mechanism of choice.

I feel like I'm horrible off the cuff. I feel awkward and put on the spot, and I'm usually left with that "I should have said" feeling for some time thereafter.

I just don't think that fast.

Composing an email lets me take whatever time I need, be it a few seconds, a few minutes, or (rarely) a few hours.

2. Email lets me say exactly what I want

Just as importantly, **email allows me to carefully craft what I say** and make sure that I'm saying what I intend to say.

That's not to say I'm still not occasionally misunderstood -- no communication mechanism is perfect -- but if I can invest the time to think about what I'm saying and how I say it, chances are I'll do a much better job of getting my point across.

Yes, I suppose it helps that I'm a writer. But let's clarify: it wasn't always so. I'm first and foremost a computer geek (and have been since Fortran was a required course back in my college days).

I was certainly no writer then; not a writer of words, anyway; I was and remain a writer of code. And yet email was **it** for me from the moment I was introduced to it.

3. Email lets me consume on my schedule

Email need never be an interruption. If it is, you're doing it wrong. I'll talk about that in a minute.

I can turn off email for hours, and I often do. *And that's OK!*

I can choose when I'm going to consume email or not. I might elect not to open my email program until noon some days, or clear out my inbox first thing and then ignore it while I get other things done.

I control it, not the other way around.

4. Email lets me reply without interrupting

Similarly, **I can reply to anyone at any time and know that it doesn't create an interruption** for them. I never feel guilty about sending an email.

That means I'm more likely to respond rather than avoid the awkwardness or annoyance of some other form of contact.

5. I can scan email quickly

No one said I have to read the whole message.

Particularly on active discussion lists, it's often enough to check out a subject line or quickly scan a bit of the message and realize that it's not something I need to read or participate in.

Deleting is also my friend. I can, and often do, quickly scan the accumulated email in the morning and delete or archive anything and everything I don't care to act on.

And I can do all that quickly and easily.

6. I can read it anywhere

Naturally, I deal with email on my computer, but I can also deal with it on my mobile phone or tablet.

Sometimes those devices aren't the best for composing lengthy replies, but as I said earlier, I can choose when I want to do what. What they are great for, however, is scanning, reading, deleting, and archiving email that comes in.

No matter where I am.

Waiting in various locations like restaurants, traffic jams, before and after meetings (and yes, sometimes during)... while having a coffee at Starbucks... **it doesn't matter where I am; email is ubiquitous**.

7. I can preserve context

One of the problems with delayed responses is that the sender often loses context. If I reply "Yes", for example, they may have forgotten the question they asked just the day before.

That's easily dealt with. My replies often look like this:

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> On Tuesday 10/27 Joe Bloe said:
> Are we still meeting on Friday?

Yes!
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I didn't quote the entire email; **just enough to give context**. It's a wonderful way to make sure everything is clear and everyone is on the same page.

8. I can keep a record

I keep almost all of my mail, both what I send and what I receive. Storage is cheap, after all.

There's no predicting what I'll need a year or two from now -- and yes, I have occasionally gone back several years to find something. Knowing I have all this email archived (and backed up) makes finding old and random items easy.

Now, to present the other side for a moment: this is why lawyers prefer phone calls and in-person meetings. Email records can be subpoenaed by courts in many jurisdictions. That message you sent last year could be an important part of a court case. As long as it's something that helps your cause, that's fine, but if not... well, you may want to reconsider how much email you keep and for how long. (And as ever, I'm not an attorney. If you have an actual question relating to the legal issues surrounding email retention, I strongly suggest you contact yours.)

9. You get what you ask for

In recent years, it's become popular to connect with people via social media. It's also a popular publication medium for content creators. Post something on social media and people see it, simple as that.

Except it's not that simple at all. Algorithms now show you what will keep you engaged rather than the information you want from the people you follow.

There's no such [algorithm](#) for email. When someone signs up for [my newsletter](#), for example, they get what they asked for: my newsletter. Every week. Yes, [spam](#) filters can sometimes interfere, but there are solutions for that, unlike social media algorithms.

I've switched many of my social media "follows" and "subscribes" to email subscriptions when offered by the creator. It's significantly more reliable.

If you hate email, you're probably doing it wrong

One of the common reactions I get to this article is "I HATE EMAIL" -- usually from people with an overflowing inbox.[2]

My friends, if that's your reaction, you're doing email wrong. There's no reason email can't be managed into a useful tool instead of an oppressive burden.

- **Unsubscribe.** Stop receiving all those newsletters and promotional emails that you're not paying attention to anyway. (Yes, even my own; if you're not finding it helpful, then why should I be bugging you?)

- **Use that spam filter.** Make sure that all that stuff you shouldn't unsubscribe from -- the stuff you didn't originally ask for -- gets swept out of your inbox automatically so you never have to look at it.

- **Don't save email in your inbox.** Set up folders and sort messages into them once you decide what they need. You're probably not going to act on 'em while they're in your inbox anyway, so why have them in your face?

- **Act on each message once.** This is an ideal I admit I don't always reach, but the goal is simple: touch each incoming message only once if at all possible. On your first read, archive it, delete it, reply to it, or whatever makes sense for the type of message it is.

- **Rules are your friend.** Use rules and filters to sort your incoming email for you automatically. My servers send me a bunch of email every night. I never look at it since I have inbox rules set up to automatically move them to a folder. If I encounter an issue, I can always find them in that folder. Use the computer for what it's good at: automated tasks.

- **Use multiple accounts.** Often we get too much email as a result of signing up for things, making purchases that require an email address, and so on. Use a throwaway account so you can pay attention only until you've completed the transaction. If a subscription or an account becomes important, you can always change the email address to your primary email account.

- **Turn off new message alerts.** Email should never interrupt you. Check email when you feel like it, and even then, don't check it very often. There's no reason to. Polling for email -- or even worse, having a new message alert pop up while you're doing something else -- not only interrupts what you're doing, but it adds to the sense of being overwhelmed.

Don't think of email as something you *do*. Email isn't a job, a role, or an end in and of itself.

Email is simply a tool to get other things done. Evaluate it like any other tool you use, and learn to use it appropriately.

But... the kids aren't doing it!

It's a common comment that individuals under a certain age (which ranges from 10 to 40 depending on who you're talking to) don't use email.

No, the kids aren't jumping on it as quickly as they once did, but I suspect they will as situations arise for which it remains the best solution. For instance, when they enter the professional workforce they will, almost from day one. Any that want to communicate reliably with those on the other side of that imaginary dividing line of age will as well.

And to be completely realistic, email's not for everyone. For folks with lifestyle issues or any issue that makes reading and/or writing itself a burden, email is not always the best choice.

Email has its issues and its problems; there's no escaping that.

But it's not dead. Not by a long shot.