

Don't be an Internet Bandwidth Hog!

By CW5 (Ret) Dave Welsh, USAWOA Webmaster

That's the unflattering name we "techies" use when we encounter an Internet user who routinely designs a web site and sends email with complex graphics, animation, an/or sound. That person is "hogging" the bandwidth upon which other Internet traffic travels.

More often than not, web designers and maintainers get enchanted with a new tool that we have or technique that we have learned. We REALLY LIKE to make our web sites, documents, etc. as fancy as possible with lots of tricks that one may not find elsewhere.

Further affecting the situation is the fact that we techies often have late model, near top-end personal computers with lots of processing power and speed. Moreover, we often have high-speed access to the Internet. We don't see ourselves as "hogs," it's just that others don't see things as we do and are not "with it" technologically.

However, I ask my fellow techies and webbies to ask themselves a couple simple questions and to think about a couple of points of common courtesy.

First among these is to consider how long it will take a "less sophisticated" Internet user to access our web page and/or reach the information that they wish to view. The user may be seeking easy information. However, if the information contains a lot of embedded animation and graphics, he or she may not be able to easily receive the information because they cannot download or process the data rapidly. Web hint -- There's a time and place for "fancies," but not in places where you have material that others may need/wish to access rapidly/easily.

Email can also be a source of bandwidth hogging!

Secondly, is to consider the size of documents that you attach to email. Does the document have graphics, sound, or other fancy features that expand file size? The "full file" may be just fine for printing to paper or presented on screen in Power Point. However, when you need to send the data to someone else, consider creating a smaller copy of the file that does not contain the bells and whistles.

In my time at the USAWOA office, we received many chapter minutes and newsletters. Many times I took a coffee and pipe break while the files were downloading. When I looked at them, I found a small amount of text and a big bunch of graphics. It is no wonder it took a long time to download.

As a warrant officer, I learned a long time ago that the substance of your material counts far more than the style. Keep this in mind. On behalf of the USAWOA home office staff, I ask that you please "keep it simple" when you're sending material to the home office.

This leads me to a second point, "forwarded email" of photos, graphics and/or animation. Many times that type of email has a large attachment. Trust me when I say that we get a LOT of that kind of mail at the USAWOA office, as well as our home machines. I am sure that in this case we may not be too different from what you find at home or work.

However, our USAWOA home office is, first and foremost, a business office. In addition, because of the small, three-person staff, everyone is busy doing many different jobs. Therefore, it creates a problem when, almost every morning and throughout the day, the inbox "clogs" up with big files that are totally unrelated to USAWOA matters.

The folks at the home office enjoy a joke; appreciate a patriotic presentation, etc, as well as the next person -- just not at the office.

Now it may be easy for you to say "Heck, if they don't want it, they can delete it." However, very frankly, it would be best to not receive it in the first place.

"Bandwidth" is being consumed in the transmission of your joke (or "you've got to see this one") type of email; time is consumed while the file is being received; and finally somebody has to look at it to decide whether to hit the "delete" key.

Have you thought about this situation on the part of your "receivers" when you hit the "forward" command?

Many email users have set up distribution lists. This is a great feature and a real time-saver on the part of the sender. I have more than a dozen distribution lists. Many of the people in my email address book appear on several distribution lists. In fact, I find the use of multiple distribution lists a good idea; it is a courtesy to the recipients.

Many Chapters send out their minutes to all their members so that those who are TDY, on leave, deployed, or otherwise tied-up can stay in touch with the Chapter and activities. If the minutes are graphics loaded they may not take the time to download or read them, thus the purpose of sending them might be defeated. Minutes sent by email or placed on a Chapter web site best serve their purpose of they are plain text files that will download quickly!

For example, I named one distribution list "WO buddies." That list contains the email address of those that appreciate receiving the "junk" stuff, jokes, weird photos, "Saddam" posters, etc. However, I have another distribution list named "WO business." I forward material of a more "official" nature to that list. In many cases, the same names will appear on both lists. However, there are some on one list but not the other.

By setting my distribution lists up in this manner, I chose what, and to whom, I forward material. I save myself time in transmitting, I save my friends and professional contacts time in receiving material; and, hopefully, I have respected the wishes of those that do not wish to waste their time receiving the unofficial type of email.

Please think about what I've written ... it's a digital age. When we depended on the telephone, I could ask you to "talk faster" or "get to the point." Finally, if I did not want to hear what you were saying, I could end the phone call. However, in our email world, I am forced to wait while your email downloads, then I've got to look at it, then delete it if I'm not interested. Sometimes several times a day.

Yes, it's a digital world, but we're not so busy that we can't show *courtesy and respect*. *Courtesy*, if we think about the "receiver" before we send, and *respect* if we think about what we sent to whom.

Dave Welsh was the Member Services Manager at the USAWOA Home Office from July 1998 to January 2003 and has been the volunteer USAWOA National Webmaster since September 1996.

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