

Moving Towards Safer Email

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Mail has existed in one form or another for almost 2,500 years. While the basic idea of getting information from one place to another hasn't changed much, the method by which the task is accomplished has evolved into an entirely different species with the advent of electronic mail(e-mail).

Like conventional mail, information sent via e-mail usually takes several steps to get from sender to receiver. However, none of these steps are controlled by either party which means that a certain degree of trust must be placed in the messenger or messengers in charge of transferring the information. Both sender and receiver trust that the message is not read by the messengers or anyone other than the intended parties and that the message will not change in any way during the transmission process. Unfortunately once e-mail is sent, it can be read and manipulated by anyone with a means and a motive and there is no shortage of each.

For non-sensitive information, the consequence of an untrustworthy messenger is relatively small. Someone may learn that you have a meeting at 1:30 for instance. This consequence could escalate exponentially if the information is especially sensitive. What if the untrustworthy messenger now knows your credit card or social security number?

In order to be confident that information sent via e-mail is safe one must assume all e-mail sent can and will be read. How then does one ensure that sensitive information will remain safe even though anyone can read it? Encrypt the information! Encryption is the coding of information so as to prevent unauthorized eavesdropping along the transmission line; the receiving unit uses the same algorithm as the transmitting unit to decode the incoming information. This means that even though anyone can see the sent information, the information will no longer make sense to anyone but the sender and receiver.

S/MIME is an acronym for Secure/Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions and it is a technology built into almost every e-mail system used today although it is not widely used (I've received over 45,000 emails in my work account, not a single one uses the technology). Not only does it encrypt the information being transferred but it also authenticates the sender/receiver and the integrity of the information. When using this technology you can be certain that your information will remain safe and in the right hands.

Stay ahead of the curve and ensure your information is safe. Ask us about getting S/MIME set up for your business today.

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