

NEO's email system wins over Outlook

Peter Moon is a partner in Logie-Smith Lanyon Lawyers

The Australian Financial Review | 10 Jun 2008

It's not often we can begin a column advising to buy this product, but if you're a Microsoft Outlook user, that's our recommendation for NEO by Caelo Software. This is how Outlook should have been designed.

First things first. NEO doesn't uninstall Outlook or even modify it. It's simply a viewer, a way of looking at your existing mailboxes, which remain blissfully unaware that NEO is watching. Everything NEO does is virtual, but once you have used it for a week it's virtually indispensable.

NEO reorganizes your messages using virtual folders that offer a more meaningful arrangement of your information. In correspondent view, every person you exchange mail with has their own folder. Open it, and you can immediately focus on dealings with that person. Maybe you want to group mail by date. NEO can present it in folders by month, week or even just today.

Likewise, the software can arrange mail into categories using a simple but clever keyword system. With a little effort, you can ensure that all mail about Project X is grouped, even if correspondents insist on using a variety of subject lines to reference it.

Another NEO trick is prioritizing mail. It can tell the difference between bulk mail and messages that are addressed to you alone. So newsletters and other subscription mail are automatically filed in their own folders, waiting until you have a moment to read them instead of clogging up your inbox. A special Hot Folder is a boon. Tell NEO that mail from the chief executive, or anything to do with Project X, plus all exchanges with Kevin Rudd are vital. Those, and only those, will feature in your Hot Folder.

To these neat features NEO adds an above average search tool. Because you can easily limit searches to particular virtual folders, there's less trash and more focus in the results. Ask NEO for a list of all unopened mail in the past week, addressed exclusively to you, and it is quick to oblige. Searches can be saved so if you regularly need to isolate certain kinds of mail, just set up the search once and update the results when required.

The end result is that an inbox with 1000 messages, all too common these days, instantly becomes more manageable. Mail presents itself in logical groupings of a few messages each. Sure, you can re-order Outlook by date, sender or subject, but you're still facing a wall of 1000 emails.

NEO has been around for a few years now, but there was little sign of new product development until version 3.2 hit the streets last month. It's a welcome upgrade with some nice new features. We like its new setting for ignoring mail of a certain age. If you want messages over, say, six months old to clear out, it happens automatically. Remember they aren't really gone and Outlook can call them up if you like.

Some folk prefer the message reading pane to be on the right of the messages list, and NEO can now accommodate that. Screen layout is flexible so you might keep your Hot Folder docked at top left, a folder for today's mail below that and other elements that suit you. These layouts can now be saved and swapped around, which simplifies experimenting to learn what works best for you.

NEO can mark emails as active, calling for a to-do action or just flagged for further consideration, and there are now hot keys that instantly call up these three views. The NEO folk are evangelists for better email work-flow management and they offer some sensible guidelines for using these three views to boost your productivity. Google NEO T1165 for an example from their knowledge base.

NEO is good value at \$US50 for the latest edition. There's a 30-day trial at www.caelo.com or you can download the superseded version 3.1 as freeware. It doesn't work with Outlook Express or non-MS Exchange mail systems. It just goes head to head with Microsoft's email champion and for our money, it remains a clear winner.

peter.moon@privacy.com.au