Using Email to Create Work/Life Organisation and Separation

By Miffy Farquharson

There's a lot of talk out there about work/life balance. It's hard to stop the creep of work hours into our home life, especially if you use a single email address or mail client to store your emails.

I've always had two email addresses – one wherever I'm working and one for everything else. I find it really useful to keep my personal information separate from my work information. There are so many websites that I am signed up to that I can't afford to lose contact with if I change jobs. I need to make sure that I keep that information in a different location.

But what do you think about having four email addresses? And how do I keep track of everything coming in from each one?

I'd like to share with you my experience using Gmail as my main collection point. Gmail is one of the most used email clients in the world. It's pretty basic looking but it is actually very powerful. One of the most powerful tools in any email client is the forward automatically tool – and this is the key to staying organised while maintaining different emails for different roles in your life.

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At work, the majority of staff use Microsoft Outlook as our mail client. Without a doubt it's the most used client in business, but I have to say that Outlook for Mac leaves a lot to be desired! Having used Outlook for Windows for many years, O4M is a disappointment, but I find it easier to use something I know well – even though it has issues – than learn a completely new mail program. O4M meets my needs as an obsessive archiver of mail – folders are clean, and easy to search and create (except on the fly – which is so annoying!)

Everything that I do as a professional teacher-librarian sits nicely in my Outlook folders and creates a single point for people in education and libraries to contact me.

But what about the other parts of my life? I'm a paid reviewer for *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults* at The University of Melbourne; I do my own reviews for my blog (plus a few others); I'm the convenor of the judging panel for the Aurealis Awards Science Fiction category; I organise the after-school tutors for Mentone Grammar; I share the administration of the MG Library blog with Bev Novak (*Bev's Book Blog*); and until recently I was the blog mistress, Facebooker and Tweeter for CBCA Vic branch, as well as creating a fledgling Google+ page.

How do I manage all of these hats and stay sane?!

The key is to assign an email for each of these roles, and to collect that information in an appropriate email client. At work we have a number of generic emails that relate to a role rather than a person: a Head of Libraries email and a Periodical Librarian email, which takes care of access to the library blog and creating access to other social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.
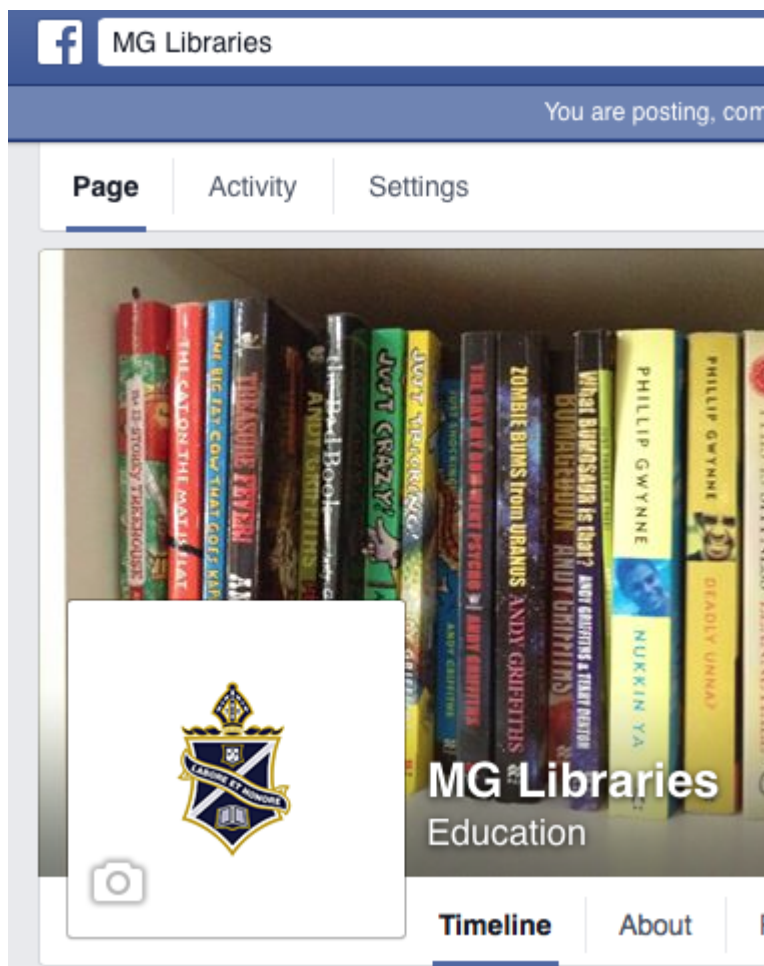
I wanted to keep the Library social networking separate from the administration of the After-School Tutors on Facebook, without breaching either my personal Facebook identity or the Blog identity. Enter another email address on iCloud. This email address is just for me and is not publicised anywhere on the Tutors page or in the profile I created using this email address. This iCloud address is also my 'junk mail' address – the one I use to enter competitions or sign-up for newsletters or new Web 2.0 tools that I'm not sure about. It just adds an extra level of separation. All of the email that comes to this address is forwarded automatically to my Gmail account for convenience.

Lastly, there are my Gmail accounts. One for me (started initially to escape the clutches of Telstra bigpond); one for my reviews – sort of a semi-professional persona; and one for CBCA Vic – so that this identity was not locked onto me and anyone who has access to the logon information can gain access to the CBCA Vic online presence.

I could have a Gmail Inbox for each of the 'cloud' addresses, but it's hard enough keeping track of work and personal inboxes without creating 4 or 5 'play' ones. The key is to forward everything on to one or two inboxes

that have particular functions - in my case 'Work' and 'Everything Else' and create folders that collect the information for you.

Both Microsoft and Google have extensive Help websites to assist you in making the most of your email clients. It is worth spending some time working through the help screens (and sometimes videos) to get the most out of these tools.

And if this sounds daunting, don't forget that all of this has been built up over time using trial and error and being open to the possibilities that Web 2.0 presents. Sometimes it works out fantastically well, and other times – not so much. Don't forget – there's always the 'delete account' button!

Miffy Farquharson is Head of Libraries at Mentone Grammar. Miffy is a Teacher-Librarian, Library Manager and Book Nut. She aims to put the right resource into the right hands at the right time, and provide appropriate resources to students and teachers, using Library and Learning Management Systems, social networking and Web 2.0 tools.
She can be contacted at:
mf@mentonegrammar.net emailmf@mentonegrammar.net]mf@mentonegrammar.net]
@miffyf02 (personal account) on Twitter
@libraryhelpmgs (school account) on Twitter
4 blogs
Fun Fair – personal blog - http://miffyjf.wordpress.com
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