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# The Importance of Email Signature Management for Remote Working

A white paper on controlling and optimizing corporate email signatures for remote workers



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## Remote Working: A Growing Trend to the New Normal

From 2005-2019, the remote working model (i.e. any work that doesn't require commuting into an office) had grown by 159% globally<sup>1</sup>. This was due to several technological advances such as video conferencing, improvements in broadband connectivity, and the launch of various collaboration and instant messaging tools.

At the same time, remote working was, and still is, seen to be attractive to many traditional office workers. It offers employees more flexibility with their working schedules, helps to maintain a better work-life balance, reduces or eliminates daily commuting, and often leads to an overall increase in productivity. Some negative aspects have been recognized such as a feeling of isolation, and a lack of relationships with co-workers, but remote working is generally perceived to have many more positive benefits. However, most remote workers would typically only work away from offices sporadically; a large portion would do so only a few times a month rather than full-time or even part-time.

By 2019, 61% of global companies offered some form of remote working policy, with Europe, North America, and Australasia being the primary adopters. This was lower in the South American, African, and Asian markets. Interestingly, only 32% of Japanese global companies offered a remote work policy, yet 80% of Japanese employees had shown interest in working remotely<sup>2</sup>.

However, in the early months of 2020, the business landscape, along with many aspects of normal day-to-day life, was completely upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid spread of the virus across the world, social distancing measures, the closure of public spaces, and countrywide lockdowns forced companies to rapidly change the way their employees could work. For many white-collar workers, that meant moving them out of their traditional office spaces and giving them the tools to work from home. The way that COVID-19 shifted so many people out of communal office spaces led to what was dubbed the "the largest working from home experiment"<sup>3</sup> in modern history.

Even after countries started to ease lockdown measures, it became clear that the way we work was going to completely change. Many companies emerged from the crisis fundamentally changed. Some employees found that working from home dramatically increased their productivity, and so were keen to avoid having to do long commutes into the office. This led to many office employees being allowed to work from home more often.

Looking past the pandemic, it is expected that more and more companies will decide that they no longer need to use physical office spaces, having seen how their staff have been able to work from home so successfully. The need to do the standard commute into offices will start to see a decline and it is expected more employees will be given a greater degree of flexibility with their working schedules. The positive environmental effects of less traffic pollution were clear for all to see during the pandemic, and so calls for ending largescale commuting will only get louder over the next decade. Along with fewer face-to-face meetings, and less international business travel, COVID-19 will have led to the biggest shakeup of how we all work in decades.

This white paper will examine some of the most common challenges that occur when a company decides to implement a remote working policy. We'll look at the difficulties that come from managing email signatures for a remote workforce before discussing the benefits of using a centralized solution. Finally, this white paper will highlight the ways the email signature channel can be leveraged in a remote working context for both internal and external stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup> Bayern, Macy, "Why remote work has grown by 159% since 2005", [techrepublic.com](https://techrepublic.com), July 30, 2019

<sup>2</sup> International Workplace Group, "IWG Global Workplace Survey", [iwgplc.com](https://iwgplc.com), March 2019

<sup>3</sup> Banjo, Shelly, "Coronavirus Forces World's Largest Work-From-Home Experiment", [bloomberg.com](https://bloomberg.com), February 2, 2020

## The Challenges IT Teams Face with Remote Working

Given how rapid the spread of COVID-19 was, and the fact so many companies had to turn all of their employees into remote workers, it's understandable that IT challenges occurred. A lot of these issues were ones that companies with a remote working policy had faced for years.

When implementing a remote working policy, the first thing an organization needs to do is ensure that it has enough bandwidth to support both Virtual Private Network (VPN) and remote-desktop access. VPNs have been a staple of remote working life for a long time but were never designed to support workload instances where an entire workforce needed to use them. VPNs are an aging technology that are difficult for IT teams to manage, with users often encountering latency issues that damages productivity. IT needs to consider how many people are going to be working remotely, and whether the organization actually has the bandwidth to deal with all manner of connections and tunnels. If VPNs are out of the question, then hosted cloud-based applications must be introduced to allow organizations to scale dynamically and offer faster connectivity. IT must ensure everyone can work as efficiently as they would do in an office. Otherwise, people simply cannot be expected to do their jobs.

Then, there are home technology issues that need to be taken into account. An IT team first has to ascertain whether a user has ever worked from home before. If they don't have access to a work computer, they will need to be provided with one. However, IT can only do so much. The speed of a user's internet connection will have a large impact on their capability to join video calls, use particular apps and access important work files, but this is not in the remit of the IT team. And they can't deal with every individual employee's physical home environment. It's important to remember that not everyone has a dedicated space to work in that's quiet and away from other members of their household. Others may have childcare issues or have to work in unsuitable rooms. But at the same time, IT still needs to be on hand to help these employees as best they can, which can be a difficult balancing act.

Having remote workers inevitably leads to surges in IT support requests. When people aren't in the same office, it becomes more difficult to supply technical assistance. People won't necessarily know how to use a particular app; the hardware they've been provided with might not function correctly; logging in to your terminal server might be difficult; a laptop might fall into the hands of a bored child. And IT will be expected to support every employee as and when an issue occurs, which are often numerous.



Remote working also leads to an increased threat to cybersecurity. These can be via phishing scams, DDoS attacks, and ransomware. Email phishing attacks spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic with cybercriminals tricking many users into revealing personal information, clicking malicious links or attachments, and unwittingly downloading malware. It can be very easy to be lured in by scams if you don't know to look out for them. That means the IT department has to educate remote workers on the threats they might encounter and how to protect themselves.

And finally, one of the more surprising challenges that IT teams have to deal with is ensuring email signatures are consistent for all employees working remotely. This might not seem like a trivial issue when you consider the challenges that have already been highlighted. However, upon closer inspection, the subject of email signature management can become a thorny one for an IT administrator.

## Remote Working and Email Signature Management

### 1. The time impact

One of the major issues that come about when trying to manage email signatures for remote workers is that the task just takes up too much time. When so many people are working remotely, an IT team simply has other important tasks to deal with to ensure business continuity. Email signature updates at the best of times are time consuming and tedious but become even more so when end users are working in different locations. At the same time, it is not best practice to let everyone design and control their own signature designs. The IT department needs to police the templates that everyone in the company uses.

Even when IT does find the time, trying to update everyone's signature manually leads to all manner of problems. If an email signature template is built using HTML, lots of test emails need to be sent to ensure that the design renders correctly. This can only really be done during periods when there is low mail flow, so this often occurs outside of standard working hours. That's not taking into account the time that is needed to actually build the signature template using HTML code.

For companies using Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365) or Microsoft Exchange, the signature will end up stacking at the bottom of an email conversation. This occurs when using Transport Rules to deploy server-side signatures to all users. For those using G Suite, it's not possible to paste HTML code directly into the editor, and this code has to be less than 10,000 characters in length. This can prove difficult if the design is particularly complex.

This doesn't take into account the fact that specific rules need to be created to ensure a signature is applied correctly. This can become exceptionally complicated for larger companies with hundreds of employees. Worst of all, if one mistake is made such as the signature doesn't render correctly in certain email clients, or the mailing rules don't work properly, the whole setup process has to begin again.

### 2. Lack of control over end users

End users should never have control over their email signatures no matter the circumstances. Every person inevitably interprets a brand in different ways. One person might decide they don't want to use the signature they've been given; another might make their own design; another might change their job title. Email signatures represent a company's identity just as much as any other branded material, which is particularly important when so many corporate emails are sent daily, and even more so when remote working practices are in place.

If end users send emails with amateurish designs, missing contact details, or unnecessary content, it's going to reflect badly on the company they work for and its brand. And if a workforce is not based in one location, employees are more likely to use more than one device for sending emails. Email signatures basically become unmanageable as IT no longer has any control over what is being sent; the control lies with each individual user.

Ordinarily, most companies never allow this to happen. But as more and more companies have employees working from home, it becomes much harder to police what templates are being used and how they look.

### **3. Lack of visibility**

This essentially ties back to the previous point which is that an IT team are unable to see what sort of signatures, if any, end users are sending out.

If everyone has been asked to copy-and-paste a template into their email client, how can IT be sure everyone has actually done it? It's too difficult to establish if any changes have been made to the design, or if the template has been applied correctly. IT would have to ask everyone in the company to send them a test email for review. As you can guess, the larger a company is, the more difficult this becomes. This is especially true when people are working remotely, doing different hours, and running their own projects. More often than not, this request will just be ignored.

If everyone is working remotely, it's not even possible to visit every user's desk. There are just too many variables to consider, hence this leads to a total lack of visibility.

### **4. More challenges**

When it comes to email signature management, you should never underestimate how many challenges can occur.

For example, the marketing department might ask IT to apply a specific banner to all users' email signatures. However, without some sort of monitoring in place, this banner can go out-of-date very quickly. End users might be inadvertently promoting an event or promotion that has already taken place. Conversely, they could be promoting an upcoming event that has since been cancelled.

Email signatures always stack at the bottom of an email conversation no matter what email service you use. The more emails are sent, the more signatures will continue to stack. This can lead to an email chain getting flooded with signature content, obscuring the actual messages.

Then, there's the risk that signatures will appear with incomplete or incorrect contact details. Not everyone uses the same contact information. Some end users may have work mobile numbers or have calls redirected to their personal number if they are working from home. Others may have a direct dial number while others don't. This can lead to some end users having blank fields appear in their signature or have details that are factually incorrect. There are manual workarounds to this, but they often don't solve the issue. The only way to really get around this is to get every end user to send an email to IT so that they can review their signature details one-by-one. But this is often not feasible or desirable.



Images in signatures can easily get stripped out or appear as attachments. To use any imagery, it needs to be either embedded directly into the template or hosted online. Embedding an image automatically increases the size of a signature and will often appear as a separate attachment when an email is sent to another recipient. Certain clients like iOS strip images out altogether, converting emails into plain-text as standard. Hosting online, on the other hand, often causes images to not appear automatically when a message is opened. Many email clients simply block external images by default until the recipient marks the email as safe or clicks a "Download Images" button.

And lastly, if an appropriate disclaimer is not included on all outbound emails, an organization increases its liability risks. Disclaimers are still required in many countries, particularly in North America and Europe, with various laws in place to enforce their usage. For example, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) mandates all emails must include a compliant disclaimer. This is used to inform patients and recipients that information contained within an email may be Protected Health Information (PHI) and not 100% secure. Without an appropriate disclaimer in place, an organization becomes liable if patient data is intercepted by unknown parties and then used for nefarious purposes.

So, controlling corporate email signatures is difficult at the best of times, but becomes even more so when you're having to deal with a remote workforce. That's why many companies decide to use third-party email signature management solutions.

## Email Signature Solutions: Perfect for Remote Users

The idea that there are dedicated solutions specifically designed for email signature management can elicit interesting responses. Simply put, a lot of IT professionals are often unaware such products exist or don't necessarily see the value in using one within their company.

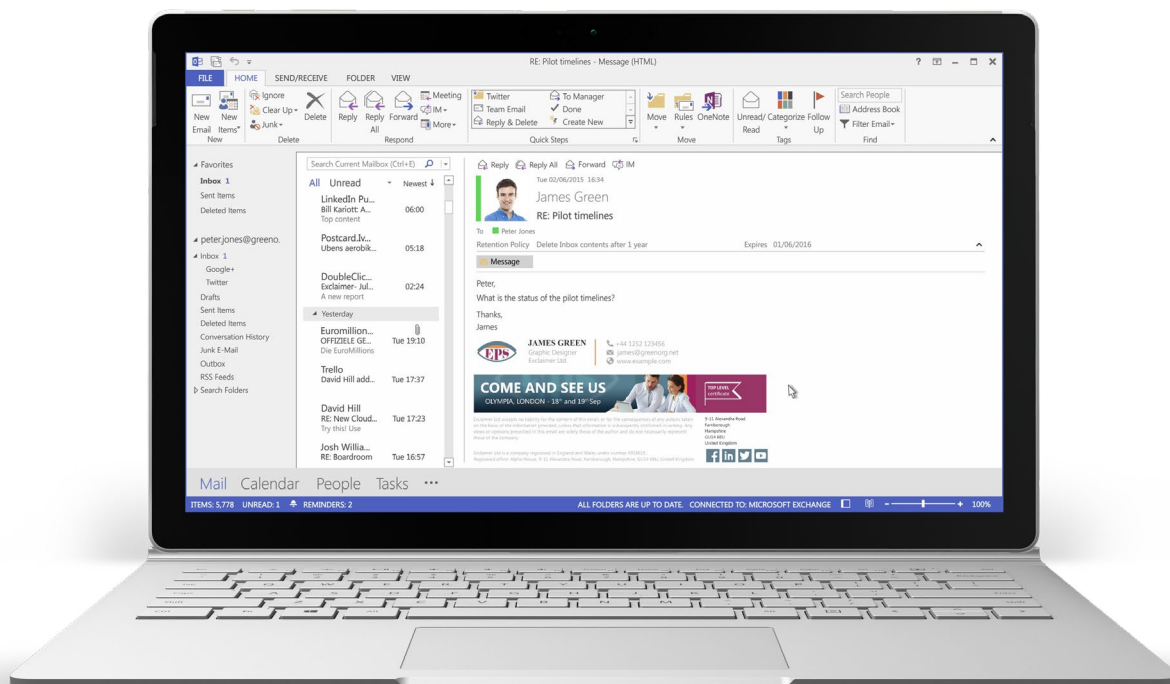


But if too much time is spent on time-consuming signature updates, and the IT department needs to focus on other important tasks, a third-party solution to simplify and control email signature updates becomes an attractive proposition. After all, companies use all manner of third-party products and services to automate simple and complex processes. An email signature management solution does just that by reducing inconvenience, inconsistency, lack of flexibility, loss of credibility, and human error.

When an email signature management solution is utilized with an organization, every email is guaranteed to have a high-quality signature appended to it. For remote workers who might be using more than one device, there is no differentiation between an email sent from a computer or sent from a mobile; the outcome is always the same. Any signature amendments can be easily tested prior to going live such as previewing the design, checking spelling, testing hyperlinks, and distrusting templates to various individuals and/or departments. A dedicated solution lets an organization change details easily to suit its needs by supplying bespoke templates for specific audiences. Everything is automated and everyone will get the latest design without the need for any manual updates.

If IT doesn't want to be involved in the management process once the solution has been set up, the team can pass this task over to the marketing department. IT still continues to control the information system aspects of signatures like defining the rules used to group employees into different departments or the data source used to auto-complete contact details. But the marketing department will have control over the design, messaging, and context which falls more naturally under their remit. And the process involves minimal and manageable effort from both teams. This allows the marketing team to use email signatures in a much more targeted fashion, using them as part of an integrated campaign. Without this level of granular control, there's little room for strategy and planning. With a dedicated solution in place, it becomes easier to segment the email signature channel more effectively, potentially even allowing specific templates to be assigned to different teams and promote separate messages across different departments.

At the same time, all end users, including those working remotely, never have to be involved in the signature design process; all changes are done automatically. An IT team effectively eliminates any manual intervention from end users, therefore reducing the possibility of internal disagreements. Editing the signature is managed centrally, therefore there is no requirement for other people to implement or enforce templates.





## Leveraging Email Signatures and Opening Up New Opportunities

Third-party email signature solutions are designed to take the burden of time-consuming updates away from the IT team. With this level of control in place, the marketing team is then able to leverage email signatures to open up new opportunities.

But how does that work in the context of remote working? There are four main ways the email signature can be utilized to support business goals.

### 1. Present a consistent brand identity

It's important that a company's brand remains consistent on all emails that are sent. This is especially true when everyone is working from home. Every employee is a walking advertisement for the organization that they work for. They need to be fully aware of its brand, mission, and key objectives. Part of that means ensuring the brand does not come into disrepute or have its reputation tarnished. That means consistent signatures must always be applied to all emails sent from any device. Employees should have no control over the design, be unable to modify the template or ignore using a signature altogether. Every email must always be consistent.

At the same time, given so many emails are sent every day, it's sensible to ensure a company's brand truly stands out in what is essentially a sea of emails. By using a professional signature template that fully incorporates brand guidelines, provides valuable content, and contains correct contact details, a company can expect to make a positive impression on even the most jaded of recipients.

### 2. Use a cost-effective marketing channel

The moment the COVID-19 pandemic started, many marketing departments saw their budgets cut. Many events and campaigns suddenly weren't going ahead as planned. At the same time, companies were still communicating via email, if not more than before. Email, as always, continues to be the dominant corporate communications channel. That's why it makes sense to apply a display banner to an email signature template.

Email signatures are one of those deceptively simple but high impact marketing techniques that often slip under the business radar. They are incredibly low-cost, highly targeted (you know who is going to see your banners as you're communicating with them), appear continuously in any email sent by your company, provide valuable information (subscribing to a newsletter, reading a press release, watching a video, etc.), are trusted, and will always be business relevant.

### 3. Engage and empower your employees

Email signatures are a great way to engage with remote workers and give them more of a sense of empowerment. When people are working in different locations, communications become increasingly important. There's a risk some employees might feel isolated and not necessarily know what's going on from a company standpoint.

Email signatures are not going to replace collaboration tools such as Slack, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams. However, email signatures do provide an avenue to subtly provide important information to all employees. For example, a simple message in a signature template could be used to remind everyone about the best ways to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing. A banner can be used to link to important news sites or provide useful advice on how to be more productive when working from home.

At the same time, it's important for any company to know how employees are coping working remotely. Some might really enjoy it, but others might find it difficult. Organizations of all sizes should want to achieve an idea of the overall mental wellbeing of their staff. Adding a simple 1-click survey to all email signatures is a quick and simple way to collect this information without having to constantly ask everyone to fill in lengthy questionnaires. This quick feedback can allow management teams to respond accordingly.

It's even possible to give employees different signature templates to choose from depending on the nature of the email conversations they are having. They could have a template with their personal mobile number on it, and another that states their working hours if they're working part-time or doing shift work. Your customer service and support teams can have specific signatures that highlight their typical response times. This helps set customers' expectations and takes some of the pressure away from your employees.

#### **4. Maintain and improve customer satisfaction**

All companies depend upon creating positive customer experiences and maintaining high satisfaction levels is a must. Going back to the 1-click survey idea that was highlighted for employee feedback, a similar survey can be used to gauge how your customers feel about support they've received. These responses can be gathered quickly, letting an organization action them swiftly.

If a lot of positive responses are received, these can be followed up with a special promotional offer or a case study request. However, if there are many negative reactions, these can be quickly followed up to fix what the issues might be. This helps to decrease customer churn and monitors overall satisfaction.

## Final Thoughts

With more people than ever working remotely in part because of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the business landscape has effectively seen the most fundamental change in decades. Remote working for traditional office employees has, and will, continue to be seen as the new “normal” as the decade progresses. At the same time, the work that IT departments across the world have done to support this dramatic shift to more remote working will continue to produce a more agile workforce that adapts to rapid change more efficiently. All these changes will also continue to have a wider impact on society and the environment, be they through less business travel or more flexible work schedules.

However, IT departments will be expected to shoulder more responsibilities so that employees can work effectively from a home environment. This means more business continuity challenges and an increased need to support staff encountering various technical issues. It is always more difficult to manage a workforce when it thrives in multiple locations, as there are more variables that can impact employee productivity as well as overall business continuity. This also applies to email signature updates, which have always been difficult to manage, but become even more so when taking a remote workforce into account.

Email signature updates are simply time-consuming, monotonous, and have a huge impact on an IT administrator’s time. Then there is the management angle. There is no guarantee that email signatures will function in the way they are expected to. Various challenges such as signatures stacking at the bottom of an email chain, incomplete contact details, and imagery being removed have caused problems for IT departments over many years. When a remote workforce is added to the mix, the danger is that that end-users obtain ownership of their email signatures, leading to lost brand consistency and wider impacts on an organization’s reputation.

Email signature management solutions are designed to relieve pressure on IT teams in the same way that other third-party tools and apps do. By having the ability to centrally control email signatures for everyone, IT can ensure brand consistency and compliance on all corporate emails. This level of control means every employee will always have a signature appended to their email from whatever device they send from and from wherever they are located.

Once email signatures are centrally controlled, new opportunities open for marketing teams. They can take corporate email signatures and use them as a low-cost marketing channel with the potential to get thousands of daily impressions. If a company uses a large remote workforce, signatures can also be used to gauge internal and external stakeholder satisfaction, namely its employees and customers. By quickly gathering feedback from these two parties, actions can be quickly taken to improve morale, implement changes, and increase communication. This is not possible without a third-party solution in place though.

That’s why so many IT and marketing professionals have trusted Exclaimer with its email signature management requirements since 2001; in fact, Exclaimer created the first ever software of its kind. Our products are used by tens of thousands of companies worldwide including renowned organizations like the BBC, Canon, NBC, UNICEF, Sony, Volvo, and Mattel. Designed for Microsoft 365, G Suite, and Microsoft Exchange, they give you centralized control over all email signature updates no matter where your users are working from.

## ABOUT EXCLAIMER

Exclaimer is the recognized global market leader in on-premises and cloud-based email signature software and solutions for Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365), G Suite, and Microsoft Exchange. Its products are used by over 75 million users in 150+ countries.

Its diverse customer base includes renowned international organizations such as Sony, Mattel, 10 Downing Street, NBC, the Government of Canada, the BBC and many more organizations of all sectors and sizes. The company has been the recipient of multiple industry awards over the years and is the only company of its type to have successfully achieved the ISO 27001 Certification for its cloud-based signature management service.

