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Firms make sure workers get message about e-mail

Timothy Mazzucca
Contributing Writer

Managers and their employees have found that corporate e-mail accounts can be used to communicate important business information, transmit documents, check in with friends or family members, forward jokes to co-workers -- and get in trouble if they're not careful.

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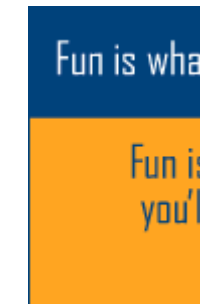
the National Security Agency that linked him to the Iran-Contra scandal. But he forgot the backups, which were eventually published as a book.

And earlier this year, 19 D.C. Metro Police officers thought no one was looking when they wrote numerous inappropriate messages from computer systems in their patrol cars.

"Many employees believe that e-mail communication has the presumption of privacy just as there is with a telephone, while case law supports complete ownership of and access to e-mail by a corporation," says Cheryl Campbell, president of IT GlobalSecure, (<http://www.itglobalsecure.com>) a Washington-based data security

Bill Gates has seen several of his old e-mails show up in Microsoft's antitrust case.

In 1987, Lt. Col. Oliver North thought he deleted all of his electronic messages at



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consultant that advises companies on e-mail policy.

"E-mail is the dominant form of electronic person-to-person communication after voice, but its use, ownership and control in a corporate environment is ill-understood," she says.

The Washington law firm Shaw Pittman makes clear that its employees should not consider their e-mail private and that deleted e-mails are archived for possible review later.

"We have reviewed [archived e-mails] for various reasons, but because of our retention policy of 60 days our success is really contingent upon the data being recent," says Nicole Picciotta, chief information officer for Shaw Pittman.

Personal e-mail use by Shaw Pittman (<http://www.shawpittman.com>) employees is not restricted as long as it doesn't interfere with business, Picciotta says. But the law firm's policy, applicable to the entire staff, says using e-mail to gain access to files or messages for nonbusiness use constitutes dismissal.

E-mails are routinely monitored, Picciotta says. Large messages that create inefficiencies within the e-mail system could lead the firm to investigate for proper use, she adds.

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