Mailing groups of people at Oxford

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Key topics

- Group-mailing concepts
- How do I?
- Benefits, limitations & best practice for:
  - Outlook Contact Groups
  - Mail Lists
  - Distribution Groups

Sending email to one person is easy, but when you're sending to lots of people there are multiple options. The options may depend on who will use the group, who is in it, how you want to process responses as well as how you want to manage it. This Do:talk is intended to help you understand which of those options is most appropriate to your needs. You may just need a simple group in Outlook, you might need a formal web-managed Mail List or you might need an Exchange Distribution Group. After this talk you'll know which will suit your needs best.

Intended Audience
Anyone who needs to email a group of people and is unsure about the best way to do so.
Prior knowledge
None

Think about your journey home tonight. There are lots of different alternatives…

Some of those look silly but they're all possible. Think about the reasons why you think some of these are silly. It might be cost, it might be based on where they can go, it might be practicality. It's the same with mailing a group – some of the options may be far too complicated for your group-mailing requirements.

Options…

Circumstances might also change.
What you thought was the best solution may turn out not to be.

Group-mailing - consider these:

- Who will use this group? Just you?
- Does the group need to be selectable from the address list?
- Are **all** of the group's members part of the University?
- Do you want group members to be able to 'reply to all'?
- Will the group need a moderator to approve messages before they're sent to the group?
- Will you also use the group to set permissions?
- How do you want to manage the group?
- Will anyone else also need to manage it besides you?
- Will the list have to receive email from public internet addresses?
- Do you need old messages to be archived?
- Do you want a prefix or suffix on every message?
- Do you want to remove attachments?

All of these questions have an impact on what solution will best suit you. Bear in mind too that, for example, the name can be anything you want - unless it's going to appear in the central address list: names in there must be comprehensible to anyone within the whole University. 'Accounts' is no good but 'St. Bob's College Accounts Team' might be.
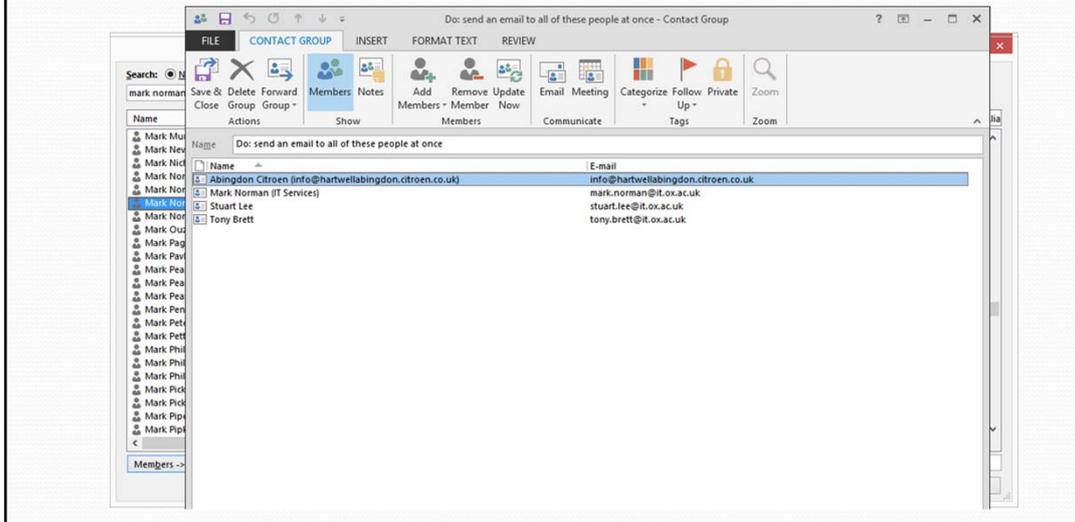
Here's the option if you just want to make your own way and don't want to have to ask or rely on anyone else.

If you're an Outlook user, it's easy to create and manage your own groups without involving anyone else.

In older versions of Outlook contact groups used to be called distribution lists. They've been renamed in more recent versions of Outlook to avoid confusion.

Create a new list, name it (you may want to use an underscore to put it at the top of your list) click to add members, select them from the list.
You can add people from the central Global Address List, from your own contacts, or both. You can also use this interface to add new contacts to your address book at the same time as adding them into this new list.

When you send to this new group there is no limit on how many names you add. However the servers may treat you as a mass-mailer if you do have many hundreds of names in there.

A message sent to a Contact Group goes to all recipients that are listed in the group. You can include Contact Groups in messages, task requests, meeting requests, and in other Contact Groups.

If you've received an email that was sent to someone's personal group, you can right-click and save it to your own contacts.
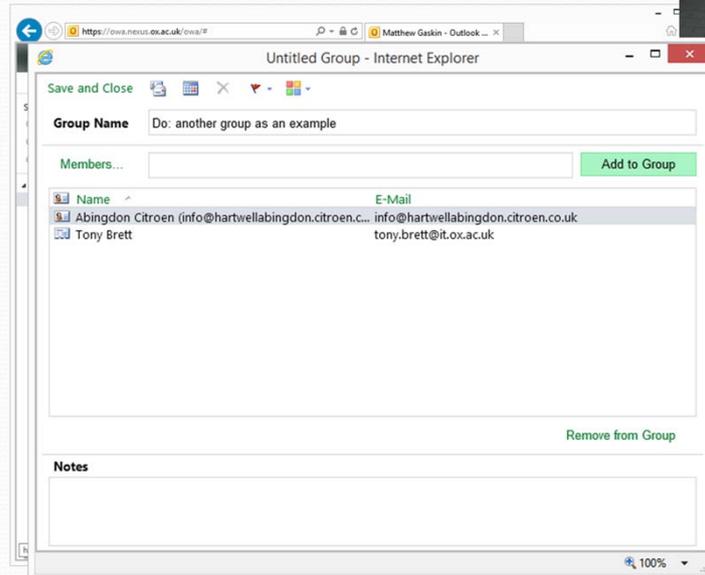
If you're not an Outlook user, it doesn't matter: you can still do this.
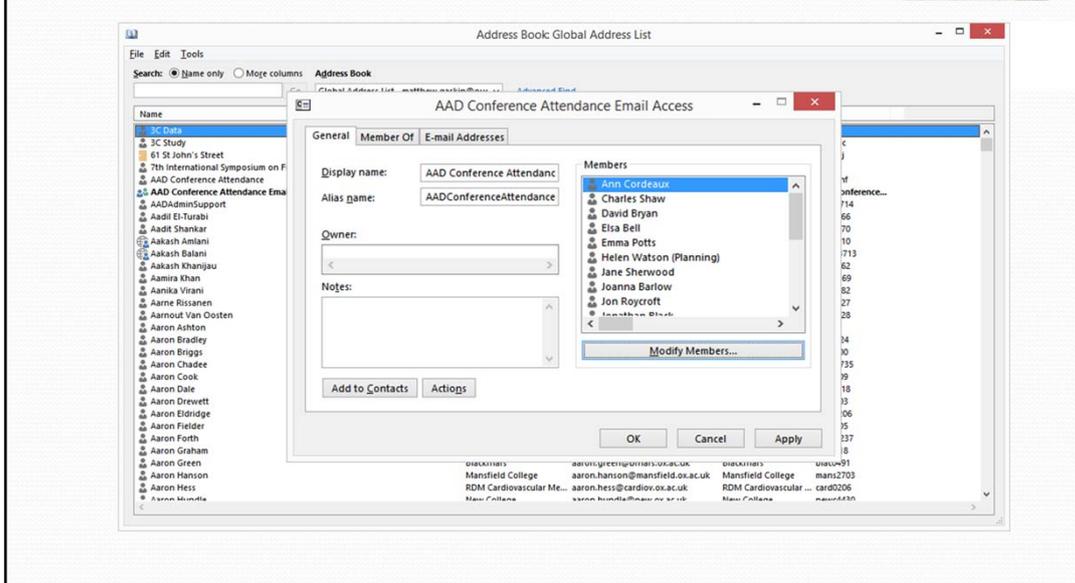
Here's the bicycle option – you need someone's help to get one, and some of the things that need servicing might need outside help, but you can do most simple management tasks by yourself once you've got it.

Cannot contain names that aren't already in the address book. So, nobody who isn't part of this University. This is because the overhead of creating and updating a central list of personal contacts for 40,000 Nexus users is too great.

As long as you've requested management rights when the group is created, you have the ability to update its membership yourself from within Outlook, or OWA. Everyone who uses the group will see the changed members. Bear in mind that users who have a locally-cached address book in Outlook might take 24 hours to download an up to date version though.

Will not be offered if it your group can be emailed from anyone on the internet – if used by a spammer it has the potential to disrupt the Nexus service, especially if it is a very large group.

Group-mailing in Exchange is a fairly minor part of the product, besides email, calendaring, appointments, tasks, notes etc. It does offer some behind-the-scenes options for self-subscription and moderation but these would have to be set via a support ticket - you can't set those yourself. Unless….

Mail Lists

- Managed from http://maillist.ox.ac.uk/
- Designed solely to handle group mailing, so has the most configurable set of options
- Not part of Nexus

This is the advanced solution. Some people think of this in the same way as being given a pile of parts and told to build a car from them.

It does mean though that you should be able to get exactly what you want. And it's not as hard as first appearances might suggest – you can get help and training specifically in how to create and manage these. You can also log a ticket to have config changes made on your behalf BUT you have the power to do it all yourself if you want to.

Can receive email from anyone, anywhere, if necessary, since this service is dedicated solely to group mailing.

It offers the most complete range of options for managing your group/list:

-moderators
-stripping attachments
-archives
-self-subscription / unsubscription
-prefixes/suffixes attached to messages
-more flexible anti-spam options

Mail Lists

Asterisk indicates you must log a ticket to have this setup or done for you.

Mail lists have the scariest interface for most people but that's because it's the most flexible and configurable.

Which is best (abridged)?

- **Outlook (or OWA) Contact Groups**
  These are self-managed, self-created, and usually personal.
- **Exchange Distribution Lists**
  Require assistance to create, change and manage but integrate well with Outlook's functionality.
- **Mail Lists**
  A dedicated group-mailing service. All functions can be self-managed, once it's created. It's the most flexible solution. However the breadth of options also makes this the most complex.

For small groups, with simple needs, Contact Groups are the simplest option. It's also the most immediate as you can set one up the instant you want it, without outside help. But simplicity means that it's also the least controllable.

Exchange Distribution Lists are a step up. A lot of the configuration and 'clever' options must be done for you, but it will show up in the Address List and you can (potentially) self-update the list that everyone sees (subject to Outlook's delay in downloading an offline copy).

Mail Lists can do everything but may be overkill for most situations. Once set up, you can control every aspect of the list and how it works. But it's the least user-friendly of these three, in part because it has so many sophisticated options to consider.