(Hay)wired

In this brave new world we get everything – but everything – by email, need it or not.

Philip H. D. SMITH.
Published: July 15, 2015 Last updated: December 2, 2015

There is no doubt that the Internet has improved our lives, or at least made them more varied. At the drop of a hat we can chart a course through the Tokyo Metro, check the weather in Parramatta and find some palate-tingling recipes when the fridge contains a beetroot, an egg and half an anchovy.

This technology now brings us the documents for our meetings. Yes, you heard me, documents. I think they could safely be classed as a dog-whistle issue, something inaudible to most people but guaranteed to make every red-blooded interpreter salivate.

I am old enough (just) to remember the old days when documents arrived by post. You’d get the main presentations and would prepare them before heading for the meeting. The very act of sending the documents presupposed some selection had taken place, a pre-dispatch triage that sorted the essential from the makeweight.

In this brave new world we get everything – but everything – by email. There is no need to work out what we need or what is relevant because we receive it all. But even the most document-fixated amongst us would grant that not everything occupying our in-tray is useful or relevant. And things we need to know may be missing.

Recently I was recruited for a meeting for which weighty files winged their way across Europe. Then the day before the meeting I realised with a clunk – this was audible to humans – that I did not know where the meeting was taking place. I was au fait with the company’s mission and vision, the CEO’s golf handicap and had acquainted myself with all corporate clusters and roadmaps. I had read about the company’s sense of corporate responsibility, in particular when going forward. But I could not find one reference to where we were going to meet.

What to do? You don’t want to risk a hard-won reputation for unflappability and gumption by admitting to the team captain that you don’t know where the meeting is taking place.

Ever resourceful I wrote to the team leader to check his travel plans, cheerily suggesting we could make the trip together. And it worked. He told me which train he intended catching and I headed to the railway station and that was it. We trundled through the countryside and arrived at the conference centre without mishap.

And my booth cred remained intact.