



The Ultimate Guide to Shared Inboxes

(Brought to you by Hiver)



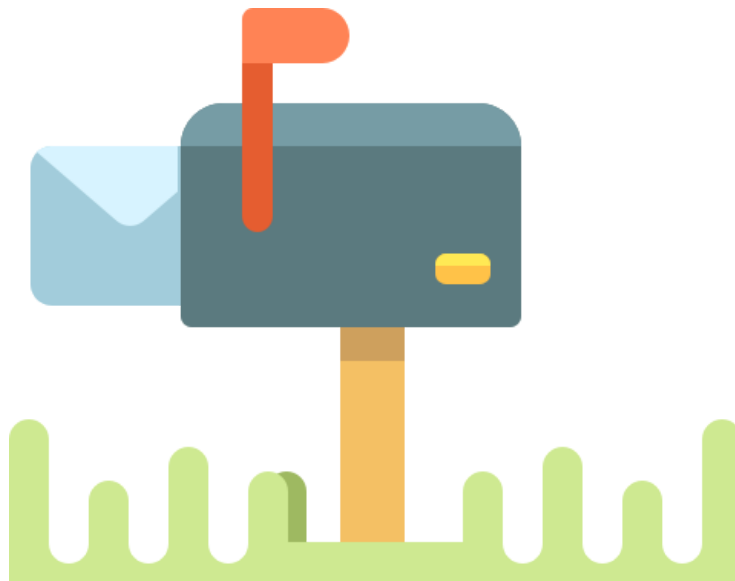
Note to the reader: This ebook discusses only Gmail shared inboxes

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Key terms: explained

- **Shared Inbox** - An inbox that lets multiple people access, read, and reply to emails. All members have access to the same set of emails arriving at a common inbox (like info@yourcompany.com).
- **Google Groups** - A service from Google that provides discussion groups for people sharing common interests. Google Groups can be configured to function as a distribution list or a Collaborative Inbox — to manage group emails.
 - **Distribution lists** - A group of email recipients that is addressed as a single recipient. The same email is reproduced for everyone who is a part of a list, and they receive it in their individual inboxes.
 - **Collaborative Inbox** - A type of Google Group that's used to manage emails arriving at shared inboxes. It lets users assign emails to members and mark topics as resolved.



Why email does not work for collaboration

Do you have a few frighteningly long and convoluted email threads weighing down your inbox right now? Meandering threads where you lose track of what's going on because too many people are Cc'd on them.

Well, you're not alone.

- Hiver's recent [study](#) revealed that an average person receives close to 180 emails every day.
- Another [study](#) by McKinsey states that an average professional spends 28% of their day reading and answering emails.

Why is the email overload situation so grim? Because: email was designed to work for communication. *And not collaboration.*

Email is still the most pervasive form of workplace communication. 86% of professionals prefer to use email when communicating for business purposes. (Source: Hubspot) There's absolutely no doubt that it's a great tool to send one-way messages or have two-way conversations.

BUT, the moment we involve more than two people in an email conversation — or when teams start working together to handle emails — it gives way to confusion.

The reason why email does not work very well for teams: The only way to share information using emails is "forwarding". Team members **forward emails internally**. They often **Cc teammates** who don't need the information. People are forced to handle emails that they did not need in the first place.

And the truth is that **we cannot do without collaborating**. Present-day organizations use email for a multitude of collaborative work: managing support emails, processing invoices, handling shipping orders — processes that require teammates to work together.

2.1 How collaboration breeds clutter

A customer sends an email to Stephen (your support guy) requesting a discount.

Stephen decides to check with Kate (the support team lead) if he can give the customer a discount. The only way for him to share that email with Kate: forwarding. He forwards the email to her, with an added message above it.

Kate is not sure how much discount they're in a position to offer — and decides to forward the email to Ramon (the marketing guy).

Kate and Ramon exchange a bunch of emails to discuss the potential value of the customer and how much discount they can offer.

And Stephen is Cc'd on all of these emails. (Isn't Reply-all a de facto for many of us?)

The problem: *Stephen only needed to know how much discount can the firm offer to the customer, but he was forced to read through every email he was Cc'd on.*

And we're talking about just one email here. Imagine the plight of teams when the email volume is high.

Forwards can always turn into long and confusing threads — that often have multiple people Cc'd (even when they don't need that information). It creates clutter. It's a distraction. It's counter-productive.

And, if you pause and think for a moment: **You cannot really collaborate with your team without forwarding emails or Cc'ing them.** That's just how email works.

The evolution of Shared Inboxes

The biggest problem that seems to slow down teamwork (and cause email overload) is the **inability to share information or collaborate with your team without forwarding emails**.

Does that mean you should start looking elsewhere? Something better than email?

Well, we are heavily dependent on email. It is used by businesses of all sizes, across industries, and in locations across the world. From scheduling sales and product demos to sending quotations and invoices — we rely on email for a lot of business-critical things

What if we could make email collaborative?

How about coming up with a way to share information (emails) that reduces the forwarding and Cc'ing within teams?

That could work.

The answer:

shared inboxes

What really is a Shared Inbox?

How do you make people stop forwarding emails to each other? Create an email account and make everyone a part of it – so that they have direct access to emails arriving there.

This is when group email accounts like `info@company` and `support@company` came to exist. These inboxes were shared among people – hence the name shared inboxes.

In the simplest of words:

An inbox that lets more than one person access, read, handle, and reply to emails is known as a shared inbox.

At the outset, shared inboxes worked wonderfully for teams:

- All members on the team had access to emails arriving at a central email address.
- Anyone who was a part of a shared inbox could start replying to messages in real-time.
- The need to forward emails reduced significantly – teams sent faster replies to emails.

Shared inboxes certainly seemed to make email work better for teams. They came with all the promise to fix issues marring email collaboration.

A bit of clarification here: Shared inboxes are not the same as distribution lists.

4.1 WAIT, distribution lists are not shared inboxes

Some people might think shared inboxes are the same as distribution lists. Why? Because distribution lists look just like shared inboxes — info@company.com, or support@company.com. And, a lot of companies turn their shared email accounts into distribution lists to manage incoming emails. It certainly leaves room for confusion.

Well, there is a world of difference between the two. **Distribution lists create a copy of the same email for everyone who is a part of the list.** The emails appear in the individual inboxes of members. (As opposed to shared inboxes where the same email is accessed by all the members.)

Let's draw out the differences neatly:

Shared Inbox	Distribution Lists
A shared inbox is a full-fledged inbox . It has a separate Inbox, Drafts, and Sent Items.	Distribution lists are a group of users that can be addressed as a single recipient. Simply put, it is a group of email recipients with the same email address.
Every email sent to the shared inbox — can be seen by users with access to the email account.	The same message is reproduced for everyone who is a part of the distribution list — and they receive it in their individual inboxes.

When replying, users have permission to change their 'send as' field — they can send emails from the shared inbox address.

The users can only use their personal address and not the distribution list email address.

The moment a user deletes an email, it will be deleted for everyone.

When one user deletes an email, it does not affect others' inboxes.

How to manage shared inboxes

There are two contrasting ways to manage shared inboxes in Gmail:

1. From inside Gmail
2. By stepping outside Gmail

Group emails

Manage from Gmail

Manage outside Gmail

Share username
& password

Delegated
access

Hiver

Collaborative
inbox

Distribution
list

Shared inboxes

How do you manage shared inboxes from Gmail?

The most straightforward ways to manage shared inboxes in Gmail are:

1. Share the account's credentials with your team
2. Use Delegated access

Let's dive in to see how these approaches play out.

5.1 Share the account's credentials with your team

The first approach to managing shared inboxes is — all members of a team use the username and password to log in to the shared Gmail account. It is still a common practice in a lot of companies (especially if they have just created a shared email address).

BUT, Google will eventually block this account as they do not recommend more than one person accessing an email address. (And it's pretty easy for Google to detect the usage as every user has a unique IP address.) Imagine losing access to business-critical email addresses like info@ or support@. That can't be pretty.

Sharing account credentials is a **strict no-no from a security standpoint** as well — even more so for companies with high employee turnover.

It's definitely not a recommended practice for teams.

5.2 Use Delegated access

The other way to go about managing shared inboxes is — create an account and name your teammate(s) a “delegate” to it.

Delegates are allowed to read, send, and delete emails (without having to log in to the account using the username and password).

It’s definitely a better practice than sharing the account’s credentials with everyone and compromising security.

BUT, as your team grows and you have more than one “delegate”, it presents a whole new set of problems:

- There is **no way to establish who has to work on which email**.
- There can be instances that **an email sits in the inbox unattended** because everybody assumed someone else will handle it.
- Teams will have **no visibility** into things like how fast they are responding to emails (or any such data about emails).

Visibility within teams is a must. It’s important that the entire team is always on the same page about who’s working on which email.

Imagine a situation when an email comes in at the sales@ email address, and two salespersons start replying to it at the same time. One schedules a demo and the other one sends out a link to a few brochures about the company. That’s a ruined first impression. Probably a lost deal too.

How do you manage shared inboxes **outside Gmail?**

Sharing the account credentials, or using delegated access — neither was a reliable option for managing a large number of incoming emails. Teams started looking for better ways.

ENTER: Google Groups

Google Groups was always a great place to have team discussions. It also worked well for sharing information. This led a lot of organizations to believe it will work just as well for sharing emails.

NOTE: You cannot manage Google Groups from Gmail. It's a new interface.

Google Groups for managing shared emails — good or bad?

Google Groups can be used in 4 ways:

Email list — **Lists** like info@yourcompany where people can contact you

Web Forum — Used for collaboration and discussion among group members (not relevant to our discussion)

Q&A Forum — Think: an internal version of Quora (not relevant to our discussion)

Collaborative Inbox — A **Shared Inbox** like info@company where teams access and handle the same set of emails

6.1 What is a "Google Groups Email List?"

Google Groups can be used as a distribution list such as info@company.com for people to contact you. **Everyone who is a part of the list receives a copy of the email — in their personal "Google Groups inbox."**

Google Groups Emails Lists are a way of managing shared email accounts but they are **not shared inboxes** as team members do not access the same set of emails.

There's a major setback here: when one person picks up an email and responds to it, the rest of the team would still be in the dark about it. There is always a possibility that two people end up working on the same email.

Even worse: when there's no way to assign emails to individuals, it gives way to diffused ownership — everyone thinks someone else must be working on it. Emails might go completely unattended.

6.2 What is a "Google Groups Collaborative Inbox?"

Collaborative Inbox is a type of Google Group that allows entire teams to search, view, and **respond to the same set of emails** — from a unified interface. The moment an email arrives, everyone who is a part of the Collaborative Inbox gets notified.

YES, Collaborative Inboxes are a type of shared inbox.

Members have two options: They can either 'take' the email or 'assign' it to another member in the same group. The good thing is that everybody knows who is working on what.

Here are a few things you can do within Collaborative Inboxes:

- Mark topics as resolved
- Edits tags attached to topics
- Filter topics (according to tags, resolution status, or assignee)

BUT, both approaches to managing team inboxes using Google Groups are ridden with problems, and teams can have a hard time managing emails.

6.3 The pitfalls of Google Groups

Your team will have to step outside Gmail to access shared mailboxes — to an interface that does not look or function like Gmail (that we're all so familiar with).

You'll have to spend considerable time and energy to train your team to use Google Groups.

Not just that, your teammates will have to keep switching between their Gmail and Google Groups quite frequently.

It is by no measure an efficient way of managing emails.

Here are a few more problems marring Google Groups:

(a) Tracking emails requires effort

Let's say you manage customer emails. An email arrives and one of your teammates replies to the customer from their personal inbox. Unless they've Cc'd the group email address in the reply, you will not be aware of that. You and the rest of the team will be in the dark about the status of emails.

(b) Enormous room for duplication of work

When you and your team don't know if an email has been handled, there's always a chance someone else might start working on it. Even when you've assigned the email to an individual, the rest of the team would not know about it. To them, the email looks unattended (unless they see a reply).

(c) Collaboration still involves “writing more emails”

Within a Google Group, the only way to pursue discussions with a teammate is email. Have a question to ask? Send an email, and you get a reply via email. Have a status update to ask? Send an email, and you again get a reply via email.

When writing emails is the only way you can exchange information with your team, you unnecessarily clog up everyone’s inboxes, and collaboration becomes difficult.

(d) Measuring team performance would be a challenge

When you run support or sales, it is absolutely important that you keep a keen eye on how well is the team dealing with emails. Inside a Google Group, if you’re looking to monitor team performance, all you’d know is the number of emails received and sent.

Reimagining shared inboxes with Hiver

We built Hiver to make managing shared inboxes easy — to make email truly collaborative, minus the lapses we've just discussed.

Everyone loves Gmail. It's almost a given that your team is pretty hands on with it already. Hiver ensures you and your team do not have to leave Gmail for managing shared inboxes.

Manage shared inboxes right from Gmail

With Hiver, you can manage shared email accounts or Google Groups like support@yourcompany.com right from Gmail.

Your team will not have to adopt a new behavior for managing shared email accounts. Using Hiver is super easy for anyone who's comfortable with Gmail's basic functionality. You'll get started in minutes, literally.

Assign emails to your team effortlessly

Assigning an email takes just two clicks from the right panel in Gmail. Your teammates can start replying on that email thread the moment you assign it to them. (You do not have to Cc them.)

The endless threads we were talking about before — Hiver puts an end to that. When you delegate emails without forwarding them or Cc'ing anyone, you're also reducing email overload for your team.

Never miss an email again

Hiver ensures your team is always on top of emails. Inside a shared inbox, the default view is 'unassigned' which shows only those emails that nobody has started working on. You can go ahead and assign them to your team (or have emails assigned automatically, based on rules). There is no way you're missing an email again.

Zero room for duplicated efforts

When you assign an email to Nathan, everyone who is a part of the shared inbox can see that. Your team will always be on the same page about who is working on what.

Despite that, if two people somehow overlap and start replying to the same email, **Collision Alerts** will quickly come to the rescue.

Your team collaborates like never before

As opposed to clogging inboxes with internal emails, your team writes Email **Notes** that appear right next to the thread they want to discuss. You don't have to spend time building context.

There's more transparency on your team

Inside **Hiver** shared inboxes, everyone knows who is working on what. Each person can see which types of questions get priority, who generally works on what type of questions. Everyone on your team will know where to turn when they need information.

When all your teammates know how things work on a day-to-day basis, it is easy for them to see the bigger picture. They feel more empowered and make better decisions.

Get deep insights into your team's performance

When you run customer support from a shared inbox, you'd certainly want to know how effectively your team is managing emails. Hiver gives you access to **crucial support metrics**. From response time to resolution time — it's all right inside Gmail.



Hiver is revolutionizing how people use Gmail to collaborate with their team.
More than 1500 business all over the world including the likes of Harvard University, Hubspot, Shutterstock use Hiver to manage their Customer Support and Sales directly from their Gmail.



"Hiver required minimal training or workflow changes as it integrated nicely with Gmail. The other solutions we tried required a different system to log into, and a complete mind shift in the way the team used email. With Hiver, we were able to sign up and get going in no time."

Virginia Trowbridge

Pulse Manager at Reali

Make Shared Inbox management effortless

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