The ''Mail-Followup-To'' header

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NOTE: This document is a proposal for text to be incorporated in the
new message format standard or published as a separate RFC. It is
written as input for discussions in the drums working group and does
not yet reflect any consensus within that group.

Abstract

This proposal contains a proposed new e-mail header ''Mail-Followup-To'',
which is intended to be used instead of the ''Reply-To'' header for
suggesting where replies to the group who participates in a discussion
should be sent.

Temporary note

This proposal does not represent any consensus opinion in the drums
working group at this time (21 November 1997).

Table of Contents

[1](#).   Introduction

The "Reply-To" e-mail header is known to be problematic because it is
used for different purposes by different mailers and when the mailer
inserting this header and the mailer using the header interpret it in
different ways, unexpected results can happen. For example, a message
intended for the author of a previous message only may by mistake be
sent to a mailing list. One way to reduce this problem is to define a
new header "Mail-Followup-To" which replaces "Reply-To" in recommending
recipients for replies destined for the group of people discussing an
issue.

[2](#).   The "Mail-Followup-To" Header

[2.1](#)   Syntax

"Mail-Followup-To"   =   "Mail-Followup-To" mailbox-list CRLF

[2.2](#)   Sender action

The "Mail-Followup-To" header can be inserted by the sender of a
message to indicate suggestions on where replies, intended for the
group of people who are discussing the issue of the previous message,
are to be sent. Here are some ways of constructing this header:

[1](#). **Merge the recipients in the "From:", "To:" and "Cc:" headers in
   order to suggest that replies are to be sent to all except "Bcc:"**

recipients of the previous message. Note that omitting any
"Mail-Followup-To:" header is not the same thing, it does not
give the protection described in point 4. below.

2. **When a message is sent to a mailing list, and the author is a member
   of this list, and wants to get only one copy of replies, the author**
   can be omitted from the "Mail-Followup-To" header.

3. **When a message is sent to several mailing lists, but the author
   suggests that further discussion should take place only in one of**
   them, the names of the other lists can be omitted from the header.
   This is similar to the usage of the "Followup-To" header in Usenet
   News.

4. **When a message is sent to a mailing list, which contains sublists,
   there is a risk that the sublists will insert "Reply-To" or**
   "Mail-Follow-Up-To" headers referring to the sublist. If this
   happens, replies might be sent to the sublist, and thus not
   reaching the full set of readers of the primary mailing list.
   Use of the "Mail-Followup-To" can be used by the author or the
   primary mailing list to stop sublists inserting "Mail-Followup-To"
   in the header.

2.3   Mailing list action

A mailing list expander may insert the "Mail-Followup-To" header, with
a reference to the list, if there is no previous "Mail-Followup-To" in
the message. A mailing list expander SHOULD NOT change an existing
"Mail-Followup-To" header, since this may reduce the set of recipients
suggested in the original message.

If a message has a "Followup-To" header, indicating a suggestion for
further discussion in a newsgroup, a mailing list expander SHOULD NOT
insert "Mail-Followup-To" except to refer to a mailing list which is
gatewayed to the newsgroup in the "Followup-To" header. A message
should not contain both a "Followup-To" referring to a newsgroup and a
"Mail-Followup-To" referring to a mailing list which is gatewayed to
and from that newsgroup, so if such a "Mail-Followup-To" is inserted,
the "Followup-To" SHOULD be removed.

2.4   Mail Client Action

The "Mail-Followup-To" contains a suggestion to the recipient of where
to send group replies, but the recipient SHOULD be free to choose other
recipients of a reply. If a mail client contains a command intended to
write a reply to all recipients of a message, the value of the
"Mail-Followup-To" SHOULD be used instead of the merge of the "From:",
"To:" and "Cc:" fields in construction a default suggested set of
recipients for such a reply.

2.5   Usenet News Client Action

If a message has a "Mail-Followup-To" header, and no "Followup-To" header, this is an indication that further discussion should take place only in e-mail, not in Usenet News, and thus a Usenet News client SHOULD NOT automatically assemble a proposed set of recipients which includes any Usenet News newsgroup. Instead, the "Mail-Followup-To" header should be used also by the Usenet News client in suggesting a default set of reply recipients to its users.

2.6   A note about the "From:" header

Whenever the text above specifies the "From:" header, its value SHOULD be replaced by the value of a "Reply-To" header, if there is such a header.

2.7   Security Considerations

There are no particular security risks with the "Mail-Followup-To" if implemented correctly. Instead, they will reduce the security risk of having personal messages inadvertently sent to more recipients than intended.

3.   Copyright

4.   Acknowledgments

Chris Newman and several other people have helped me with preparing this document. I alone take responsibility for any errors which may still be in the document.

5. References

Not ready

6. Contact Information

6.1 Author's Addresses

Jacob Palme   Phone: +46-8-16 16 67
Stockholm University and KTH   Fax: +46-8-783 08 29
Electrum 230   Email: jpalme@dsv.su.se
S-164 40 Kista, Sweden

6.2 Working Group Chairman

Chris Newman <chris.newman@innosoft.com>

6.3   Applications Area Director(s):

Keith Moore <moore+iesg@cs.utk.edu>
Harald Alvestrand <Harald.T.Alvestrand@uninett.no>

6.4   Area Advisor

Harald Alvestrand <Harald.T.Alvestrand@uninett.no>

6.5   Mailing lists:

General Discussion:drums@cs.utk.edu
To Subscribe: drums-request@cs.utk.edu
Archive: ftp://cs.utk.edu/pub/drums/mail-archive/