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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).

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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

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[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

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