Google Groups are the New "Conferences"!

Google Groups makes it easy for groups of people—such as project teams, departments, or classmates—to communicate and collaborate over topics of common interest. There are several types and purposes for groups. For example, a group can be an online forum for discussing a popular technology or answering questions about a class. You can send email to everyone in a group with one address. Or you can invite a group to an event or share documents with a group.

Here are some things you can do with Google Groups:

- Read group posts through email, the online forum, or both
- Hold online discussions about a specific subject
- Host a question and answer forum where students answer and rate each others’ questions about your suggestions or ideas
- Track and manage support requests from co-workers
- Organize meetings, conferences, or social events among members of a group

You can belong to lots of groups. Each group contains multiple topics. Topics are different discussions related to the group's subject. Topics in a group for an upcoming conference might be "What hotels have conference discounts?" or "Final session schedule." Each topic can contain multiple posts. Posts are the individual replies from within the topic.

Types of groups

Groups can be configured in many different ways, depending on the group’s purpose. You might use each group in a different way, depending on the group type. The most common types of groups are Email lists, Web and Q&A forums, and Collaborative Inboxes.

Web and Q&A forums

A web forum is similar to the online discussion forums, such as forums where frequent flyers discuss travel issues or where music lovers discuss the latest charts. A Q&A forum is used to resolve issues or questions within an online community. These two types of groups are similar, though a web forum is usually more focused on general discussions, while a Q&A forum is focused more on finding answers to questions.

Forums or Conferences

Forums allow authorized users to:

- Mark a response as a best answer (Q&A forums only)
- Click Me too! to indicate they have the same question as the topic creator (Q&A forums only)
- Moderate the group, such as by removing topics or banning authors

With Web and Q&A forums, you’ll probably only use the Google Groups forum interface to communicate with other members. You can choose to get email too, if you want it, but some features of these groups are available only on the online forum interface.

Email list
This type of group is like a mailing list—it contains the email addresses of its members but also has its own address. Using just the one email address for the group, you can:

- Send email to group members
- Invite group members to meetings
- Share your content with group members, including Google documents, sites, videos, and calendars

With email lists, you might or might not use the online forum interface very much. You can use the forum interface to read and post messages, communicate with the group via email, or both. Some people communicate with the group via email and just use the forum interface occasionally to find join new groups, or as an archive of older messages in a group.

Email list groups vs. Google Contact Groups: You might be wondering how Email list groups differ from the contact groups you can create in your My Contacts list (click Contacts in Gmail). There are 2 main differences to keep in mind:

- The primary difference is that a Google group has its own email address, so it can be shared in your Groups directory and others can send messages to it. Your contact groups, on the other hand, are for your personal use. Contact groups don't have their own email address, so no one else can send messages to them. Also, when you send email to a contact group, recipients get the email only in their inbox. But when you send email to a Google group, group members can see the content in their email, in the online forum interface, or both.

Collaborative Inboxes

Use a Collaborative Inbox to manage and track queries from customers or co-workers. This is the perfect type of group for support organizations! In a Collaborative Inbox, team members can easily assign and track support tickets and other queries from customers or co-workers. Team members can:

- Take a topic they volunteer to resolve
- Assign a topic to another group member
- Mark a topic as duplicate

Also, when you send email to a contact group, recipients get the email only in their inbox. But when you send email to a Google group, group members can see the content in their email, in the online forum interface, or both.

Google groups vs. contact groups:

You might be wondering how Google groups differ from the contact groups you can create in your My Contacts list in Google Contacts (click Contacts in Gmail).

The primary difference is that a Google group has its own email address, so it can be shared in our Groups directory and others can send messages to it.

Your contact groups, on the other hand, are for your personal use, to make it easy to add a list of addresses to your email messages and meeting invitations. They don't have their own email address, so no one else can send messages to them.

Google groups and shared global mail lists contacts: Google groups aren't included in the contacts you access in Google Contacts. Instead, you'll find them all in our Groups directory. However, after you send a message to a group, it appears in your All Contacts list in Google Contacts.

Google groups and "auto-complete": After you send a message to a group, it's automatically added to your All Contacts list in Google Contacts. Now, whenever you want to send another message to the group, invite the group to a meeting, or share a document with the group, just start typing its address and it will be completed automatically.