

## What is an instant message?

A message sent from one user to another that is received as soon as it is transmitted, using an online platform.

### Some Examples:



Facebook messenger



Teams



Text message



WhatsApp

**Others include:** Instagram direct message, Skype, WeChat, etc.

## Things to keep in mind when using instant messaging

Instant messages created and received by University employees in the course of their work are considered university information to the same extent as information in other formats such as emails. Employees are responsible for the information that they create or transmit with instant messaging.

### Personal or Confidential Information

- Be prudent about instant messages that you create and what you attach to those messages. Once you send a message, you have no control over what a recipient may do with it. This can lead to unintended disclosure of personal or confidential information.
- Avoid the use of instant messaging to transmit personal or confidential information.

### Information Management

- Use instant messaging for casual conversation, informal chats and questions.
- Avoid using instant message for conversation that will evolve into a discussion that will have operational and/or strategic value and must then be managed. If this happens, employees have the responsibility to document issues or decisions which arise through instant messaging in another longer-lasting medium e.g. a memo or email that can be stored on a shared drive or DocuShare or sending an email confirming decisions or outcome of discussion.
- Disclose your instant messages when responding to an access to information and protection of privacy requests. The *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)* applies to

instant messages sent and received, and employees must search all information under their control. Once an access to information request is received, it is a criminal offence to delete or alter the instant messages. Contact [aipo@uottawa.ca](mailto:aipo@uottawa.ca) if you have any questions.

The same applies to information identified or affected by a legal proceeding.

#### Appropriate and Professional use

- Avoid inappropriate conversations – use business-like language. Ensure all your messages are informative, courteous and concise.
- Avoid personal remarks, unnecessary personal opinions, confusing acronyms and slangs. Instant messaging is a business communication and must be treated with the same amount of professionalism.
- Be mindful of the workplace context – instant messaging should be brief – longer conversations should be reserved for email. Keep your personal messages separate from business messages.

#### TRANSITORY INFORMATION

Since instant messaging should be used for casual conversations, informal chats and questions, not discussions that have strategic or operational value, consider it as transitory. Discard messages once they are no longer needed. For more information see the *What can I delete best practice*.