

There are certain phrases you never want to hear:
"Do you know a good 24-hour plumber?"

"We're going to have to taxi back to the gate."

But there is one phrase I've been hearing lately that sends me over the edge like no other:

"It's in the Dropbox."

These four little words, whether spoken via voice, text, or email are typically uttered in response to an inquiry about a drawing or document that is now updated and "ready for distribution." But it's the distribution part where things often break down. Because where once I received updated paperwork upon completion, I am now expected to go hunting in the most mundane round of Legends of the Hidden Temple to (hopefully) find the latest revision.

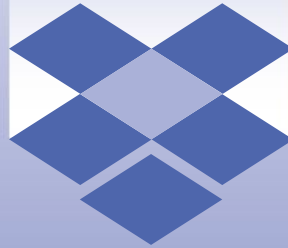
The introduction of services like Dropbox was supposed to make communication and the sharing of files easier, but instead, it seems like we've never been less collaborative.

When Dropbox came along it seemed like a gift from the gods (or at least, the cloud). Now files could live in a central location and all members of the team could access them at any time. This seemingly solved two problems, a) it would be clear that the drawing in Dropbox was the most recent and b) since it was and continues to be difficult to email large files, by using Dropbox team members could access the files themselves, making the size of the file nearly irrelevant. Problem solved right? Nobody would ever need to ask "which drawing are you working off of" again right? Hardly.

Listen, I love Dropbox. I pay for the 1TB of storage. My entire digital life lives in Dropbox and I do think it's the greatest thing since sliced mango. But while Dropbox has made the act of sharing files easier, it seems to have led to a complete breakdown of the release/revision system. (Yes I'm generalizing, yes this may not apply to you, but it applies to A LOT of you and I don't have the emails to prove it (because there are no emails, get what I am saying?)) Files are constantly being uploaded to the Dropbox and it's impossible to track the journey of a drawing. Hopefully the dates on the drawings change (not just the file name, change it in the title block!), but there often isn't a clear revision hierarchy (Rev A, Rev B, etc.)

Time is ALWAYS of the essence and no design process has ever been ahead of schedule. Every department is always waiting for information from someone else before they can move forward with their own work. You used to get an email in your inbox. "Hi! I'm the updated drawing. Here's what's new with me. I'm attached to this email." Now you wait and wait and then ask "What's the ETA on the drawing?" only to be told "Oh, it's in the Dropbox." YOU MEAN I COULD'VE BEEN WORKING ON IT THIS WHOLE TIME? WHY DID NO ONE

DROPPING
DROPPING



THE BALL

The Etiquette of Dropbox Sharing

TELL ME?!" This truly hurts my soul, because it displays a profound level of disrespect. We should acknowledge that everyone's time is valuable and no one should have to feel rushed on a project simply because they weren't informed an update was available.

And if you say having Dropbox notifications turned on is the solution, I must ask, how do you get through your day? I don't need a popup every time anyone uploads anything for every show into my dropbox. I care as much about the company management car share schedule as they care about my "gobo ideas." Relying on the off chance you see a notification saying there is a new drawing is like your landlord telling you your rent is going up by posting a flyer on the town hall bulletin board.

I miss the email release. It creates a paper trail which is crucial down the road if there is conflicting information between drawings or departments. Also, an email release can be the kickoff to a conversation. No show has ever been made better by less communication. It says "here is a thing, let's talk about it." The use of Dropbox does not excuse you from talking to your collaborators or keeping them informed. It should be like a backup, a safety net, another tool in our arsenal to make communication clearer, not more muddled. I have literally walked into a theatre, discovered something different than I was expecting, only to find out an updated drawing had been placed in the Dropbox I never knew about. We need a better system.

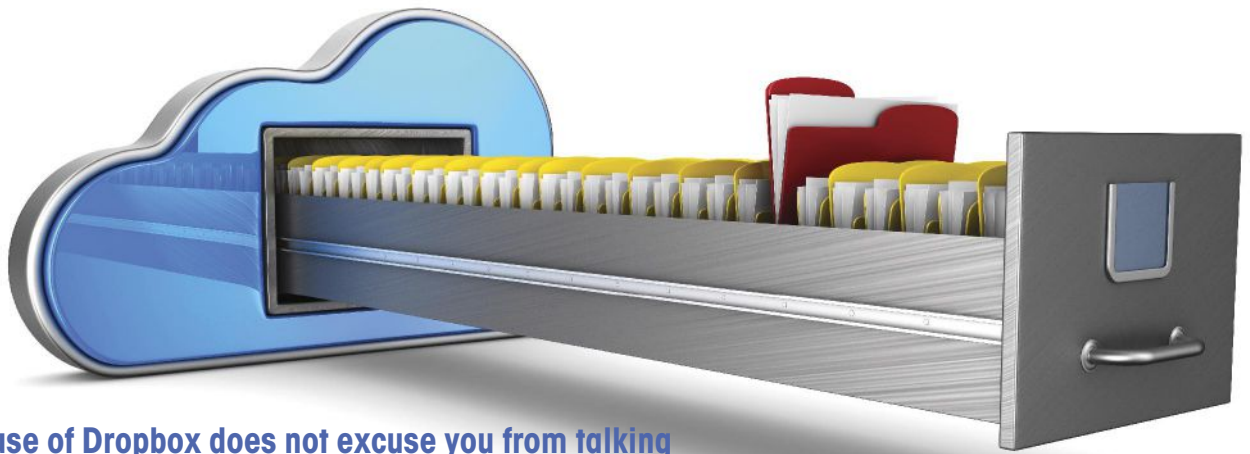
My 8 completely arbitrary rules for using Dropbox

1. Keep the Dropbox clean. I shouldn't need the Marauder's Map to find the latest drawing. I should be able to go in to the Dropbox and instantly find the latest drawing without having to email anyone to ask "which is the version I should be looking at?" If there are 3 files called "Rev C", "Final" and "Current" ...I'm going to end up playing pin the tail on the drawing and hope I get lucky.

2. Create an OLD folder. Want to keep previous revisions in the Dropbox? Cool! But move them into an OLD folder so everyone knows they are as fresh as last month's goat cheese.

3. Every new release must be accompanied by an email. Period. Once you've put a new drawing in Dropbox, you're not done! Put down that margarita! Send out an email to all relevant parties and let them know there is an update to be retrieved. If possible, attach the drawing to the email and say "it can also be found in the Dropbox", and if you're super nice, include the direct link to the file.

4. Drawings must have dates and revision names! "Which one are you looking at?" "Oh I'm looking at the drawing in the Dropbox." "Yeah me too, except there are 8 draw-



“The use of Dropbox does not excuse you from talking to your collaborators or keeping them informed. It should be another tool in our arsenal to make communication clearer, not more muddled.”

ings currently in the dropbox. (see rule #1)

5. What is different in this drawing? Tell us in the email! Or in a revision cloud on the drawing. Or in an original song. Don't just upload a new drawing and then make the team play the old *Highlights* game Double Check. (hint...the new one has a saxophone in the tree trunk!)

6. If you do announce the availability of a file in the Dropbox, don't keep working on that same file. You wouldn't mail me a ground plan and then come over and keep working on it while I'm tracing over top of it. If you have more work to do, work on that offline, and then when it's ready, upload and announce a new available drawing.

7. Consider the file types other departments may need. It's possible the set designer and the technical director share drawings via MS Paint but most lighting/projection/sound designers are going to ask for a Vectorworks or CAD file. Stage managers and directors are going to want to see PDFs. (And Dropbox makes it easy for them to view those PDFs on their iDevices). Anticipate these needs and provide those file types without having to be asked for them.

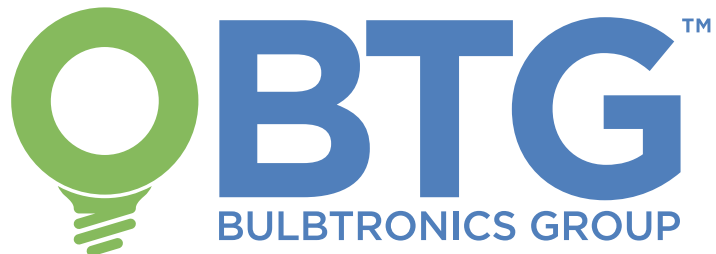
8. Do not delete files in a Dropbox unless you made them! It's possible to remove your access from a folder which is different than straight up deleting them. You can wreak havoc on someone else's hard work so proceed with caution! Break this rule and you may likely wake up with a horse head in your bed. (albeit a beautifully crafted paper mâché head courtesy of the props department)

No solution is perfect. Bits of information are going to be lost but we should be doing everything we can to mitigate that fact. We need to talk to each other

more. We need to acknowledge that we're all working on multiple projects at a time and clarity is the key to juggling all of them. We can all help each other out and lift each other up by respecting everyone's individual process and time. Don't make anyone on the team hunt for a drawing. Don't make someone ask a question you already know they are going to need answered. And let's use technology to aid and support the

tasks we already perform, not replace them. Let's work on creating a process that produces phrases like "We came in under budget," "Let's end tech early tonight," and "We've decided to double your fees." Ok maybe that last one is a fantasy, but proper Dropbox etiquette is a wish we can all make true. **SD**

Cory Pattak is a freelance lighting designer and creator of in 1: the podcast. www.corypattak.com/



BTG is Lighting Done Right:

Lamps

Moving Light Lamps, Theatrical Lamps, LCD/DLP Projection, TV & Film Lamps

Color Filters

Gel / Diffusion, Sheets, Rolls, Sleeves, Panels

Batteries

AA, AAA, C, D, 9V, Alkaline, Lithium, Rechargeable

Electrical Supplies

Stage Pin, Twist Lock, Cam Type, Edison Type, Multi-Pin, Powercon, Assemblies

Expendables

Gaffer Tape, Electrical Tape, Sash Cord & Tie Line

Gobos

Glass, Metal, Custom, Holders, Stock Gobos

Lighting Fixtures

Led Lighting, Work Lights, Moving Lights, Followspots, LED Panels, Stage Lighting Fixtures

Distribution Centers in: NY, FL, NV, CA

Email us: sttv@bulbtronics.com | For more info call 1-800-227-2852

www.bulbtronics.com