Mail-In-A-Box Administration Manual

TBD

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About This Manual

Why?

The idea for this manual came about in conversation with @Eliter over on the Discourse Forums. Having an in-depth administration manual will help new-comers and maybe even veterans to Linux / MIAB to be able to setup and maintain their own mail server!

What is Mail-In-A-Box?

About Mail-In-A-Box

Mail-in-a-Box lets you become your own mail service provider in a few easy steps. It's sort of like making your own Gmail, but one you control from top to bottom.

Technically, Mail-in-a-Box turns a fresh cloud computer into a working mail server. But you don't need to be a technology expert to set it up.

Development

Mail-in-a-Box is based on Ubuntu 18.04 LTS 64-bit and uses very-well-documented shell scripts and a Python management daemon to configure the system. Take a look at the system architecture diagram and security practices.

Development takes place on github at https://github.com/mail-in-a-box/mailinabox.

Note that the goals of this project are to . . .

- Make deploying a good mail server easy.
- Promote decentralization, innovation, and privacy on the web.
- Have automated, auditable, and idempotent system configuration.
- **Not** make a totally unhackable, NSA-proof server (but see our security practices).
- **Not** make something customizable by power users.

Additionally, this project has a Code of Conduct, which supersedes the goals above. Please review it when joining our community.

Mail-in-a-Box is dedicated to the public domain using CC0.

Joshua Tauberer (@JoshData) began this project in 2013 and is the primary maintainer. Thank you to all of the contributors!

Why Build Mail-In-A-Box?

Mass electronic surveillance by governments revealed over the last several years has spurred a new movement to re-decentralize the web, a movement to empower individuals to be their own service providers again.

Although the core protocol of email, SMTP, is inherently decentralized, in practice email has become highly centralized because it is so damn difficult to implement the dozens of modern protocols that surround it. Mail-in-a-Box takes care of all of that, and no more.

This is important not just for privacy, but for the ability for the web to evolve and improve as it always has: through the ability of everyone to see how it works, tinker, and propose innovative changes.

Special

Acknowledgements

This project was inspired in part by the "NSA-proof your email in 2 hours" blog post by Drew Crawford, Sovereign by Alex Payne, and conversations with @shevski, @konklone, and @GregElin.

Mail-in-a-Box is similar to iRedMail and Modoboa.

Mail-in-a-Box is based on Postfix, Dovecot, Z-Push, Roundcube, Nextcloud, Apache SpamAssassin, Postgrey, Nginx, @konklone's nginx config, and more.

Is Mail-In-A-Box right for me?

Is Mail-In-A-Box right for me?

TBD

Finding a Hosing Provider

& Setting Up a Domain

What is Hosting and a Domain?

What is a Server? Why do I need one?

MIAB requires a server to run. A server is a computer specially designed to run server applications, typically to be powered on all day, all month, all year, non-stop. However, when we say "server" in a hardware context, it does not necessarily have to be server-grade hardware, it can be any computer.

While you can run MIAB on your computer at home, there are some considerations you should take, as that may not be the best option for you. See the (WIP) section for more detail on choosing a hosting provider.

There is a business model, where companies host your servers for you, for a minutely, hourly, or monthly cost, depending on your provider. These companies put servers, on shelves, in aisles, in data centers (which are warehouses designed for servers). Of course, they provide power and Internet to your servers too. They also keep the building, server hardware, electricity and network maintained, with many backups and security measures in place to make sure that your server experiences the lowest possible downtime.

What is a Domain? Why do I need one?

In a computer network, every computer is assigned an IP address to communicate. These

IP addresses look like the following: 8.8.8.8 (for an IPv4 address) and 2001:4860:4860::8888 (for an IPv6 address). Since those addresses are difficult to remember, DNS, or Domain Name System, is a system that converts words such as google.com (which is a domain) into an IP address.

Although you can technically setup a mail server without a domain, it will: make it difficult for users to remember your IP address, puts you in a position where you could be locked into a hosting provider, and MIAB is't really designed to work without a domain (or Fully Qualified Domain Name, FQDN, it might sometimes be called).

To get a domain, you must get it from a domain registrar.

Installing & Preparing Ubuntu for Mail-In-A-Box

Installing Mail-In-A-Box

Updating & Maintaining Mail-In-A-Box

Troubleshooting &

Diagnosing Issues with

Ubuntu & Mail-In-A-Box

Getting Help

If you need **help**, please check the maintenance guide and then ask on the forum. If you think you have found a problem in Mail-in-a-Box or don't get a response on the forum, then open an issue on github.

We will post announcements and security advisories to our twitter account @mailinabox, the announcements section of the discussion forum, and our Slack chat (see above).

Do not tweet questions: Always start on the forum so others can benefit from seeing your question too.

Reporting spam/fraud/abuse: Mail-in-a-Box actually isn't a mail service at all. It is more like a cooking recipe for how to create a mail service — therefore, we have no way to know who is following the recipe and have no control over people baking our cake to hide a poison. Like cake, there are many recipes for creating email servers besides Mail-in-a-Box (Microsoft Exchange Server being one of the most popular), and we are just unlucky when sometimes someone with bad intentions choses ours. In other words, we don't control how people use Mail-in-a-Box and have no technical or legal means to disable other people's services. You may want to check out the Mail-in-a-Box discussion forum and coordinate with anyone that has reported a similar situation recently.