

# Selecting the right email system for your business

How important is email to your business? Many small businesses depend heavily on email for marketing as well as constant communication with customers and suppliers — it's often the main channel for business-critical information and processes. But even if your business puts less emphasis on email communications, you'll want to make sure that you're getting the right system for your everyday business needs, budget and compliance requirements.

Understanding your email system choices and how to implement them is an important step for any small business. This guide will walk you through the major steps, from selecting an email provider to getting your email system running.

## Related guides:

Harnessing Internet-based computing

Managing data storage

Maximizing your Internet connection

## Keeping email selection simple

### OBJECTIVE

- Red and Associates principal Pam DeCounter needed to select an email system that offered reliable access without complicated IT requirements.

### SOLUTIONS

- Based on recommendations from colleagues, Pam selected a hosted solution to simplify the technical aspects of implementing and maintaining an email system.

### RESULTS

- She's quite happy with their hosted POP3 and webmail service, which gives them the simplicity, reliability and anywhere access they need for their business, but without the technical complications she doesn't need.
- By combining web hosting and email Pam also received a price break.

For the full case study, please see our *Selecting the right email system for your business* brochure.

# Selecting and implementing business email

Email comes in many flavors, so some business owners are unclear on how to select the right one and get it up and running. In reality, it's easier than it looks. So here we'll break it down into three simple steps.

## Step 1: Assess your mobility needs

How mobile you need your email to be will help determine the protocol (the language your email uses) that will serve your needs. For most small businesses, your options are Webmail, POP3 or IMAP (or Webmail in combination with POP or IMAP). In a nutshell, POP3 passes messages from the server through to your desktop client and IMAP maintains duplicate inboxes on the server, your desktop and your mobile device.

The following will help you pick which one makes sense for how you work:

**If you usually check email...**From only one computer (e.g. your work machine)

*Then you should choose...*POP3

POP3 gives you fast email delivery to your work machine and will make it easy to set up email accounts on employee machines.

**If you usually check email...**From your work computer, but sometimes from the road

*Then you should choose...*POP3 and webmail

POP3 will give you fast email delivery to your work machine, while webmail gives you the ability to check it remotely when you're traveling. Most email providers offer both webmail as well as POP3 support.

**If you usually check email...**From different computers and your mobile device

*Then you should choose...*IMAP and webmail

By using IMAP, you'll ensure that your inboxes will all be synced up and that you aren't missing important messages when checking email in multiple locations.

## Step 2: Choose a provider

Search the term "email providers" and you'll probably find too many to count. But your choices basically come down to: free, paid or do it yourself (DIY). Here's a rundown of what to consider for each:

- **Provider type: Free email**

(e.g. Gmail, Yahoo!, Hotmail)

*Technical skill level:* Novice

*What you'll want:*

- » POP3 or IMAP support
- » Good spam and virus controls
- » Custom domain support  
(@yourbusinessname.com)

*Average Cost:* Free

**Tip:** Pay close attention to things like mailbox size and attachment limits to make sure your email system doesn't cause more problems than it solves.

## Five things to ask an email provider

- Do you support business domains?
- Do you support my operating system and desktop clients?
- Do you offer 24/7 technology support?
- Do you have mailbox and attachment limits?
- What spam and virus protection do you offer?

- **Provider type:** Paid  
(e.g. ISP, Register.com, Gmail for business)

*Technical skill level:* Novice

*What you'll want:*

- » POP3 or IMAP
- » Uptime % in service level agreement (SLA)
- » Customer and technical support
- » Spam and virus controls

*Average Cost:*

\$2.00 - \$10.00 per month

**Tip:** Before signing up for a service, check that the provider supports the email applications you plan on using (e.g. Outlook, Apple Mail, Thunderbird, etc.)

- **Provider Type:** Do It Yourself

*Technical skill level:* Moderate to Expert

*You'll need several things:*

- » Broadband Internet connection
- » A mail server and software (make sure it's compatible with your operating system)
- » DNS (domain name server) information and public IP address
- » A person who knows what to do with all of it

*Average Cost:*

\$1,000 - \$2,000

**Note:** Your cable/DSL router must support network address translation (NAT), and you'll need to get a second public IP address from your Internet service provider (ISP). Check the documentation for the unit or with your ISP.

# Managing email Q&A

## Q: How can I keep all my email accounts organized?

A: If you find yourself using more than one email client (e.g. Outlook and Thunderbird), choose IMAP to keep your inboxes in sync on both.

## Q: Should I have my own domain?

A: Even if you don't have a website, having an email address @yourbusinessname.com helps your business appear more credible.

## Q: I'm constantly having to forward email inquiries to different team members. Is there a more efficient method?

A: Set up individual email accounts for each department like "pr" or "sales" @yourdomain.com. Or, if your email solution supports it, set up automatic email routing to distribute each successive inquiry to the next team member using a single address.

## Q: I constantly get more emails than I can respond to. What solutions are available?

A: Sometimes you're just too busy to respond to customer inquiries right away. Set up an autoreply for addresses like "info@" to reassure the customer that somebody's there.

## Step 3: Get Everything Running

Finally, you need to get your email set up for each user.

### 1. Choose an email client

Common clients for Windows:

- Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express
- Eudora
- Thunderbird

Common clients for Mac:

- Apple Mail
- Thunderbird
- Eudora

### 2. Set up user accounts

- *In Outlook...* select Tools under the Email Accounts menu
- *In Eudora...* select Options under the Tools menu
- *In Thunderbird...* select Account Settings under the Tools menu
- *In Apple Mail...* select Preferences under the Mail menu

Check with your provider for specific instructions for your email client.

### 3. Configure accounts

Information you'll need to know:

- Username and password
- Email address
- Incoming server (usually pop. or imap.servername)
- Outgoing server (usually smtp.servername)

**Note:** You may be asked to change a server port or select Allow Authentication. If so, follow the provider's instructions carefully to ensure proper configuration.

Most providers offer detailed instructions for setting up the various desktop clients that they support, but bear in mind that not all providers support all desktop clients. The steps are usually fairly straightforward, but read them carefully to make sure you're doing it correctly. This is when technology support comes in handy.

## Get the Most from Your Email

Your email can help you work more efficiently if you just keep some simple tips in mind.

- **Rules rule:** Email rules allow you to automatically sort certain types of messages to stay organized. For example, automatically save emails from certain senders to a folder or forward emails with certain keywords.
- **Form groups:** Set up group addresses for business teams or customer lists to make sending updates faster.
- **Make folders:** Organizing messages into folders for specific topics helps save you time searching for messages.
- **Archive:** Be sure to archive work-related email for future reference. In fact, depending on your business type, it may be required.

**According to a report by Osterman Research, "The top four problems in managing SMB [small and midsize business] email systems are storage related: increased backup/restore times, growing sizes of messages, users sending large attachments, and overall growth in email storage requirements."**

— *Messaging News\**

\*"SMBs Slow to Offload Messaging to SaaS, Struggle with Storage, Say No to Social Networks, Maybe to iPhone," Reprinted with permission, [www.messagingnews.com](http://www.messagingnews.com), April 9, 2010.

# Need more? We're with you.

Your community representative is always happy to help. You can count on them as a resource for compliance solutions to consider that fit your specific business needs, budget and level of expertise, as well as advice and resources on a range of small business technology issues.

Visit <http://centurylink.com/smb-resources> to contact your community representative, and learn more about how technology can boost your business. You'll find information sheets, videos, case studies and more.



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