

Email Mini Primer

What sort of email account is best.

For many the Internet means email, and most likely Hotmail, Gmail or some other mass provider. You want email, do you go for a dial-up account or web-based email? As ever it depends on how you intend to use it.

Web-based

The main advantage of web-based email such as Gmail and Hotmail, is that you can access it from any place in the world that has a computer with Internet access. There have been one or two security scares with this type of service, however if you don't have home access to a computer it is probably the only way to have a personal email account outside of an account at work. Which may not be suitable for all those jokes and pictures your friends send you!

POP3

Most ISP's provide multiple accounts for their customers using the POP3 protocol. To use such an account you would have to use a mail client such as Outlook Express, Outlook or Thunderbird and messages would be downloaded from the ISP mail server to your computer.

With some ISP's you can create 'virtual' mailboxes also called aliases or forwarders which can all be directed to one mailbox. If you are a small organisation then this can give the impression of a well organised company by using separate email addresses for different functions, ie sales@whatever. Although many ISP's do also allow access to email accounts via a web-based interface, unless you use it exclusively or have IMAP setup, you won't be able to view emails you have sent from your main computer.

If you are likely to need to access email from abroad, and you don't like the idea of Internet email, then ask the ISP how you access their service from abroad before signing up.

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IMAP

In these days of multiple gadgets for email, you may find that you want to access your email from your main computer, your laptop and your iPhone or Blackberry. Although there are ways to do that with a POP3 account using services like Google Mail, it is not exactly seamless or automatic and you don't get your sent messages from your iPhone in your Sent Message box in Outlook for example. So you need to use an IMAP service which synchronises all your folders on all the gadgets you have IMAP set up on. It sounds perfect, but you have to have a live connection to your mail server for this to happen and you therefore don't get the same flexibility offline.