Demystify e-mail terms and get on with your life

Applies to: Microsoft Outlook 2010, Outlook 2007, Outlook 2003, Outlook 2002, Outlook 2000

[Print]

Crabby Office Lady

Everybody is on e-mail these days. And while it's easy to set up an account and start sending and receiving messages, there are some technical terms that could make your time spent with e-mail more efficient, if you understood them. Crabby's here for you.

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A while back, I wrote a column called Demystify a few computer terms and get on with your life. For some of you, it was as if I fanned a fresh breeze into your lives. For others, I was blowing stale air into ears and minds already well-acquainted with BIOS, macros, the rumba, and the beguine. At the behest of my readers and colleagues, I'm going to suss out some common (and a few not-so-common) e-mail terms that scare, irritate, and just plain vex you.

Some e-mail terms I feel like defining

E-mail client

The software program on your computer that enables you to send, receive, and work with your e-mail. Examples of e-mail clients are Outlook, Microsoft Outlook Express, and Eudora.

MIME (Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions) and S/MIME (add Secure to MIME)

MIME extends the basic, text-oriented Internet mail system. It provides a way to format messages so that they can be sent over the Internet to people using all kinds of e-mail clients, protocols, and text editors. S/MIME supports encrypted (secret-coded) messages — that's what Outlook uses when it's used in conjunction with Microsoft Exchange Server.

Flame mail

An e-mail message that is mean, hot-tempered, curt, or not-so-polite. It raises your hackles and gets under your skin. And unfortunately, it's contagious. Flame mail is in abundance on electronic bulletin boards, online discussions, and so on.

Domain name

The part of an e-mail address that comes after the @ sign. My e-mail address is crabby@microsoft.com, so my domain name is **microsoft.com**. Yours may be **hotmail.com**, **aol.com**, or **(your own obscure name).com**. Your domain name identifies one or more Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, which are assigned numbers that identify computers on the network. Each domain name has a top-level domain it belongs to, such as .gov (government), .org (nonprofit organization), .mil (the military), and now .tv (my guess is as good as yours).

Spam

Spam is unsolicited commercial e-mail. No one is completely safe from spam, but it sure is a hotbed of conversation. I'm hoping for some serious anti-spam legislation to pass one of these days. A girl can dream.

Protocols: beasts of another type

To send e-mail to and from different kinds of e-mail servers, we need an agreed-upon format for sending and receiving the data. This format is called the protocol, and there are a few types. You may recognize these as options you choose from when setting up Outlook or Outlook Express:

IMAP (Internet Message Access Protocol)

IMAP is a way to access a server and, if you like, keep your e-mail messages stored on the server. Using IMAP has its advantages:

- You can view just the headers of your e-mail messages and decide whether you want to download them. No need to download an entire spam message when the heading is disgusting enough.
- You can create and move folders or mailboxes, delete messages, and even perform a search for certain parts of a message — all on the server.
- Your e-mail travels with you and is always available since it's not stored locally on any particular client (and I know you know what an e-mail client is).

NOTE You do have to be connected to the server continually while you're receiving or sending your e-mail, so that's one thing to consider.

POP3 (Post Office Protocol 3)

When you use POP3, your e-mail is stored on the server initially. But once you read it (or at least go and get it), it's downloaded to your client and is no longer stored on the server. As you may have guessed, there is a regular POP2, which became a standard in the olden days (the mid-1980s). Now most servers use POP3, so if you're still in POP2 land (or, heaven forbid, POP1), get with it, Grandpa.

- **Hotmail** Hotmail is Web-based e-mail. You can read and receive e-mail messages from any computer in the world with an Internet connection and a Web browser that supports graphics.
- **Outlook Web Access** Using Microsoft Exchange Server and Microsoft Outlook® Web Access (OWA), users can access data on the server by using an Internet browser from a UNIX, Macintosh, or Microsoft Windows®-based computer.

MAPI (Messaging Application Programming Interface)

MAPI is used with Outlook in conjunction with a Microsoft Exchange Server mail server. MAPI is a lot like IMAP (in fact, it's an anagram of it), but it provides a wider array of features when you use it from within Outlook.

SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol)

Most (but not all) e-mail systems use SMTP to send e-mail messages across the Internet, from an e-mail client to an e-mail server. That's why you need to specify both the incoming server (POP3, IMAP, and so on) and the outgoing server, the SMTP server, when you set up your e-mail accounts.

"A man thinks that by mouthing hard words he understands hard things." — Herman Melville

About the author

Annik Stahl, the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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