

Hosted Email 101

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E-mail Out of any internet technology that has enabled businesses to function more quickly and efficiently, email is the most important. According to wikipedia, "most business professionals today spend between 20% and 50% of their working time using e-mail. When a business's e-mail goes down productivity grinds to a halt. Since e-mail is so incredibly important to businesses, understanding how email works and what the options you have for hosting your email are before making any decisions about outsourcing your email is essential. There are three components to most modern hosted mail server software:

- Mail Transfer Agents (or smtp daemons) transfer email between servers.
- POP3 and IMAP Services that allow user's mail clients (such as Microsoft Outlook) to read email that is on the server.
- A Webmail Client that allows a user to read their email and administer their account online. Once you have purchased a new web hosting account, your host will set up your domain on their mail server and use DNS to tell the rest of the world that their server is the one that email for your domain should go to. You will then be given a username and password to either a webmail client or a control panel which you will be able to login to and set up users. Once you have set up a user, dan@test.com for example, when someone sends an email to them the sender's server will use DNS to find the email server for the domain test.com. Once the sender's mail server knows where to send the mail it initiates a conversation with the accepting server's Mail Transfer Agent. If the mail is properly formatted, the mail server will accept the email and put it into dan@test.com's mailbox. Now that the email is in dan@test.com's mailbox he can view it using either webmail or a mail client. To view it via webmail he simply needs to log into the webmail client, usually located at mail.domain.com, and the webmail software will read the email and present it to him. To view the mail through a mail client, he will need to choose a mail protocol to use to get the email. The two protocols that mail clients use to get email are POP3 and IMAP. POP3 tends to be the method that most web hosts prefer their clients use to get email. This is because by default POP3 deletes email from the web hosts server and moves it to your machine. This keeps your mailbox, and the host's server, from constantly filling up with email. In contrast to POP3, IMAP keeps email both on the server and on the user's desktop. IMAP is a good choice for people who have email accounts with a large amount of storage and who want to take advantage of the redundancy that having all of your email on both the server and on your mail client provides.