

Computer Tech Talk

Electronic Mail

By Dennis Henson

What is Electronic Mail? Electronic mail, email for short, is a typed form of communications that can be transmitted from one person to another digitally, usually over the internet. Email is one of the two most heavily used internet applications. The other internet application is browsing for information and entertainment.

Email History. Email has been around for over 30 years. Email is really just an enhanced version of the telegram. Early in the development of the internet, text messages were available. Email enhancements to send file attachments (photos, word processing documents, song files, etc.) soon followed. Today from home you can send and receive photographically rich email in web-style format (html).

POP3/SMTP Email: All internet service providers (ISPs) have email as a basic feature. Email is stored temporarily for you in the provider's Post Office Protocol Version 3 (POP3) email server. You retrieve your messages from the provider's computer with your PC's email program, just like taking mail out of the mail box. Your sent message goes to your ISP's Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) email server where it is routed at high speed to the designated recipients email server mail box. The time from when you hit send until the message is available at the recipient is called the email latency. A value less than 30 minutes is OK and latency is often much less. POP3 email requires that you setup account information in your PC email program. You must enter your email address, the name (or numerical equivalent) of your ISP POP3 and SMTP servers. You also enter a user name and password. Keep the user name and password private to prevent others from setting up to read YOUR mail! Fill in the return address field for the account with YOUR correct email address. When someone clicks "reply" to send you back a response, the return address is used to get the message to the right person. Sent and received mail can be stored on your computer as long as you have physical room on your hard drive. Popular PC email programs include: Microsoft Outlook Express, Microsoft

Outlook, Eudora by QualComm, Photographic Expert's Group Netscape Mail (Communicator), ".jpg" compression format to and Thunderbird (free open-source from Mozilla).

Web-mail: With web-mail, you browse to a website like MSN messenger, Yahoo Mail, or Google Mail, log in and read your mail from any computer that can make a connection. Mail is stored on the provider's computer (not your PC) until you erase it. You don't need an email client just a web browser like Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. Note that most ISPs allow you to use a web browser to look at your POP3 mail box while browsing. You can take a peek at your personal mail box while away from your email program.

Email Addresses. No matter what kind of email you use, you must have an email address that uniquely identifies you. Like your street address and zip code, your email address allows the electronic mail system to deliver your mail. The format of an email address is a group of letters and numbers followed by an "at" symbol @, and then the name of your email provider's domain. For example, one of my email addresses is hcs@mchsi.com. Addresses are NOT case sensitive. That is, it does not matter if you use all capitals or all lower case. Most often, I use lower case because it's easier. By the way, you can have more than one email address. At last count I have eleven email addresses, each for a different purpose.

Size Limits. There are limits to the size of any individual email message and there are limits to the total amount of email content that you can store on-line. At present, national provider limits are changing, but a single message of 10 Mbytes is usually allowed, with a total limit sometime as large as 250 Mbytes available. Mediacom and Alltel both allow at least 10 Mbyte email messages. So what does this value mean to you? You'll never get close to these limits by just typing text. A typed character is represented as a single byte of data, so you would need 10,000,000 keystrokes to reach the limit. Pictures are another matter! Attach a few family photos made with a high resolution digital camera and you will blow the single message limit easily. Check your camera manual for the appropriate setting for photos that you know you will be sending via email. Use the

Photographic Expert's Group make photo take less space for storage and transmission. Break up large sets into multiple messages with fewer photos per message and you should be OK. Sending photos or other scanned documents via an internet dial-up account can take a very long time. See the previous article of "Computer Tech Talk" for typical photo download times.

Email Threats. Today, there are three main culprits that affect email. Viruses try to disable or flood email, spam makes email hard to use, and phishing tries to steal your personal information. Viruses are malicious software programs that can be embedded in email attachments. These programs are written to do harm to your computer, erase important data from your operating system, or clog the world's email traffic. Protect yourself by keeping your anti-virus program active and the virus definition list up to date. Virus protection is a subscription service and you must have current updates.

Spam is unsolicited email. Some people with highly published email addresses get 100's of these useless and sometime offensive email messages every day. Keep your email address reasonably private when possible (share it with friends and business needs only). There are tools available to help filter and delete unsolicited email.

Phishing is a relatively new phrase that identifies internet evil-doers using email as bait to "fish" for passwords and financial data. Someone decided to replace "f" with "ph", so "phishing" resulted. Not only account details but also personal and financial data can be at risk. You would never give your social security number or your bank account numbers to a stranger, nor would you give these data over the phone when someone calls you cold, so why would you give up this information by replying to an unsolicited official looking email. Just don't do it!

Email Etiquette. Here are some important dos and don'ts to keep in mind when sending email. Be concise and to the point. Use proper spelling and grammar. If your email client has a spell checker, use it. Do NOT type in all capital letters. That's the email version of SHOUTING! Re-read email before you hit send. Use the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) feature to hide all those other

recipients of your email. Do not and I'll be happy to reply. Don't forward this message to someone request delivery and read forward me something that has else. Take the time to determine receipts. We'll read your mail if passed through 100's of other whether the message is genuine we want to and if you don't get a people and probably is not true or simply a rude hoax. If you reply, try again. Don't use email anyway. These messages are a send this email on, you've to discuss sensitive information. big waste of time and most are perpetrated a hoax on your Email is stored and saved in designed to pull on your friends. An excellent site to visit several places. Don't write in an emotions or frankly designed by and search for hoaxes is: email what you wouldn't say to evil-doers simply to see how www.snopes.com. It doesn't take someone's face. Don't write much email traffic they can five minutes to save your friends inappropriate emails at work. cause. The second type of email a lot of wasted time and Email services provided by your message that I think should be unnecessary concern. employer belong to the employer as illegal as a computer virus is and the messages you create are an email hoax. These things Questions and comments about part of their documentation. circulate continuously (it seems) this article may be emailed to:

My Pet Peeves. I and none of them are true. If extremely dislike email chain you get an email that sounds too letters. If you want to talk to me odd or too good to be true, it's via email, then do so directly probably a hoax. Please don't

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