

## Managing your email inbox

Rosemary Hattersley and Lincoln Spector help you claw back your sanity when using email

Electronic communications can be a minefield. Whether it's huge attachments that clog up an inbox, formatting that makes your communications look amateurish, images that don't display by default or clever email programs that try to second-guess whether you'll want to read that message, managing your mail can be a time-consuming task.

Other issues arise from the fact that it's all too easy to be misunderstood over email. This is what prompted the invention of the emoticon. Those smiley faces and winks were originally used as a means of making communications clearer. They're best used sparingly, however.

Other useful rules of email engagement include spellchecking and adding a signature with contact details, so the recipient can get in touch other than by hitting Reply. Most email programs allow you to automatically add a signature at the end of your outgoing mail; some prompt you to do so each time. Other programs require you to use the Insert or Options menu or the Settings tab.

### Subject lines and reply all

One of the most common email complaints relates to group messages that you didn't want to receive in the first place - but you end up copied in on the next 20 responses. 'Reply all' ought to be a rarely used feature; it's responsible for many a clogged inbox and not a few expletives. As well as being

a lazy means of communicating (have a meeting instead), it's easy to accidentally copy in someone you didn't intend to. With multiple people contributing to a discussion, and messages crossing out of sync, your recipients will probably quickly switch off anyway.

You should also try to be clear about what your messages contain. A straightforward heading in the subject line will make it easier for recipients to see what you're contacting them about. Note, too, that many spam filters reject or delete messages that have no content or no subject line.

### Make webmail your main email

Windows often wants to help out by launching applications to take you to a web link or so you can send an email to someone. Microsoft's own browser and email client may not be what you want, however. To permanently set a web browser or email program as the default, visit Default programs in the Control Panel.

In Firefox, usefully, you can set either Gmail or Yahoo Mail as the browser's default email application, so that clicking a 'mailto'

link on a web page will bring up your chosen program. However, when you click Windows Explorer's Email button or use Word's Send Email option, it tries to fire up Windows' own email program. We have yet to find a browser that can be installed as Windows' default email program.

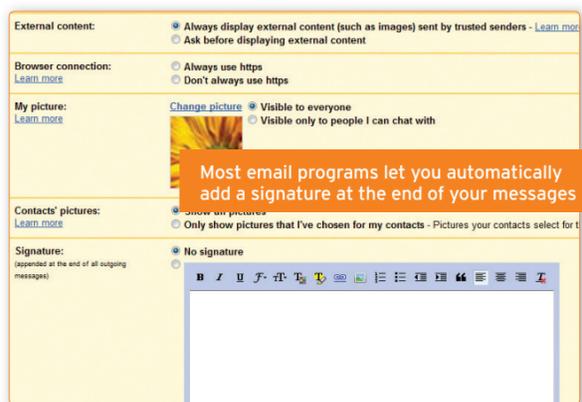
Install the free Affixa (affixa.com) as Windows' default email app and when

you tell Windows Explorer, Word or WinZip that you want to send a file, Affixa uploads the file and creates a message in the Draft folder of either Gmail or Yahoo Mail. There's no need to allow Affixa to add itself to the system tray, but you do need to click Yes when asked whether it should be your default email program.

In the Options window, enter details to set up your account. Be sure to select 'Launch [your service] after creating a draft message' under the Account Settings dialog box. If you use Gmail, the option is on the Preferences tab; for Yahoo, it's on the Account tab. Affixa will then show the draft message in a browser window for addressing, editing and sending. We've found it does this more reliably in Gmail.

If you upgrade to the full version of Affixa for an annual subscription of £2 you can then use the tool for more than one account, and zip files before you send them. Firefox users may want to augment Affixa by setting their browser to handle mailto links directly. It's faster, and it doesn't interfere with Affixa's handling of Windows apps' mail tools. Within the browser, select Tools, Options. Click the Applications tab and select the appropriate choice in the mailto line.

If you use Gmail and Chrome, you might wish to supplement Affixa with ChromeMailer (tinyurl.com/252nlcd for the 32bit version; a 64bit version can be



Most email programs let you automatically add a signature at the end of your messages



Cloudmark DesktopOne is a free program that filters junk and suspicious messages in your webmail inbox

downloaded from tinyurl.com/8gru5z). It makes Gmail the mailto default, without affecting Affixa's work outside of the browser. It's also faster than using Affixa for this job.

### How to send large files by email

Another major bugbear with email is its tendency to block up inboxes. Large attachments take an age to send, holding up whatever else you want to do with your PC, and aren't always welcomed by the recipient. Furthermore, images embedded in emails can be used to disguise viruses. You must therefore be very careful when sending attachments this way.

As well as using an effective virus scanner, you should consider email encryption such as PGP (pgp.com) for sending sensitive files, and a service such as YouSendIt.com for sending large attachments. The latter works by uploading the file to a secure site accessible to the recipient(s) of an email by using the link provided. Files up to 10MB can be uploaded and sent this way for free, but are time-limited. The recipient usually has two weeks to download the file at their convenience.

### Securing your email

None of us is immune from email scams. Just this week, everyone at PC Advisor received a friendly email from someone we'd never heard of, suggesting we were

probably in each others' contact books from a social event we'd attended a while ago. The accompanying photo of a tourist in Times Square looked innocent enough; it's pretty certain whatever was embedded within it was not. Learning to spot scams is an art in itself but, as well as practising caution, it's wise to equip yourself with tools to prevent dodgy emails arriving in the first place.

First, make sure you have a virus scanner associated with your email account. If you're a webmail user and got your email accounts from your broadband provider, there's likely to be a virus scanner provided. Check this if the name of the email security program used isn't listed at the end of your emails.

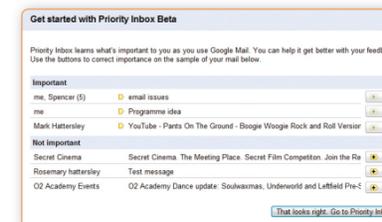
MSN, Hotmail, Outlook and Outlook Express emails are protected by Microsoft's own filtering and security mechanisms. TrustPort, Message Labs, McAfee, VirusScan and Webroot Email Sense are all respected email filtering programs that are often used for filtering corporate and personal email.

If you need a free webmail security program, try Cloudmark DesktopOne (cloudmarkdesktop.com). It unobtrusively filters junk and suspicious messages, offering a "clean desktop experience" so you can skip unsolicited messages and get at those you want to read.

### Use more intelligent messaging

This summer Microsoft upgraded its email filters to manage messages based on what you routinely do when you receive a message of a particular type or from

Gmail Priority Inbox learns which emails are likely to be most important to you



a particular sender. If you always open messages from your boss the moment they arrive, it will ensure they are prioritised in the delivery queue; if you always ignore messages from your dad as they tend to be unfunny round-robin jokes, it will place them in a 'look at later' folder. Other messages will be automatically quarantined or sent to the junk folder, even if there's nothing actively amiss with the content.

Not everyone's convinced these email-management efforts will make it easier to manage your inbox deluge, but that hasn't stopped Google launching a similar service in the guise of its Gmail Priority Inbox beta. Here, you can switch messages around and tell Gmail to give them more or less importance. The Google service then learns your preferences and handles similar messages accordingly.

## VIEW WEBMAIL IN YOUR DESKTOP CLIENT

Windows Live Mail can be used to manage messages from a Gmail account and to allow you the convenience of viewing your webmail on your desktop rather than having to log into it online. It's not always glitch-free, though. We've had reports of Sent Mail being stingy with the details of who was sent each message, for example.

To ensure Live Mail displays the recipient column, launch Windows Mail and go to your Inbox, your Sent Mail folder or whichever view you want to modify. Right-click anywhere in the column header above your messages and choose Columns. Tick the box next to a column you want to see. If you wish, you can change the order in which these columns appear using the Move Up or Move Down arrows.