

As seen in the Salisbury Business Journal

EMAIL – What choice is right for your business?

Even after 40 years since the first emails were sent, most people (even those who use it every day) don't quite understand how it works, or what's required to keep this world-wide messaging system functional. For businesses of all sizes, it's an absolute necessity to keep emails flowing as smoothly as possible. There are many choices for email systems; a company can host their own in-house email system, have an outside provider host their email server(s) for them, rent a domain name and space from a 3rd party host or provider, use a free internet email host, or any combination of the options above. The possibilities of how to configure and keep mail flowing seem endless.

In this article, I will cover some of the basic principles of how the majority of email systems work, the most common options for small businesses, and the "pros" and "cons" of these various options.

Basic Email

An email is simply an electronic document which originates on a computer, is then delivered to an email server for the purpose of delivering the message to its intended recipient. Once the first email server receives the message, it then attempts to deliver the message to the recipient's email server. Once the recipient's email server has the message, it will deliver that message to the final recipient. Although it's electronic and only takes a second or less to happen, this email delivery system is very similar to the old "snail mail" postal system that we all know and love.

In the "snail mail" system, you would compose a letter, and then write an address on it to show its intended recipient. You would then place that message into a mailbox or take it to the post office. In this case, the mailbox and the post office would be the "email server". Once the post office has the message, it will deliver that message to the recipient's closest post office, and then the message is delivered to the recipient's personal address.

Although I have just described what seems to be a simple delivery system, an incredibly complex system of servers, filters, routers, software, and hardware are used on modern email systems to address technology (and end-user) problems such as hardware failures, junk emails (SPAM), end-user mistakes, and malicious attempts to destroy data.

Email Options

The most common choices for business email are to either purchase and host an in-house email server or to pay to have a 3rd party company host and maintain the email server for them. One of the more

common email server types is Microsoft's Exchange Server system. This type of email server gives greater control, flexibility, and business-friendly options for collaborative groups such as shared contacts, calendars, task scheduling, client/server synchronization, smart-phone synchronization services, and sharing of mailbox data. A company can also opt to have someone else host their email for them. With outsourcing email services, a company can very accurately budget all year long with regards to their email services. With these hosted services, the host will maintain the server, software, hardware, updates, technical support, and most importantly of all – data backups. In this case, you have a predictable and stable payment each month or year, depending on your plan. Sound too good to be true? Well, if your company has 20 or less employees, it's probably more economical to have your email hosted for you unless you're already planning on buying a network server. Even if you already have a server, it's often a good idea to have a 3rd party company host your emails for the convenience of a fixed or predictable budget, and to avoid the headache of hardware and software failures and upgrades.

If your company has between 20 and 50 employees which use email regularly, deciding how to handle your company's emails can be a little more complex. With more employees comes more mailboxes, more emails, and more junk emails. If you're debating on whether or not to host your own email server, or outsource to a hosting company, you should consult with a trusted IT consultant on specific options that are practical for your specific company. You should be wary of an "IT Expert" which makes a recommendation for your company's email needs without knowing what your company's email needs are.

For most companies with more than 50 employees that use email regularly, it's usually more practical to host your own in-house email server, especially if your company already maintains one or more other servers on your network. Since most email hosts charge by the mailbox and/or the data storage volume, the cost of hosting begins to exceed the cost of purchasing and maintaining an in-house email server. However, if a company wants to maintain the convenience of a fixed budget and not having to worry about hardware, software, and upgrade support – hosting may still be a very attractive option.

For more information on email hosting, in-house email servers, email antivirus, anti-spam, or other email management options and considerations, contact your local IT consulting company for details.

By Tan Nguyen
tan@tezlagroup.com
Tezla Group, Inc.
www.tezlagroup.com
Salisbury, MD