

IMAP vs. POP

There's more than one way to send and receive email: there's webmail, POP/SMTP, and IMAP/SMTP.

When you use webmail, you receive, read, write, and send your email from a web page using a browser like Internet Explorer or Safari. When you use POP/SMTP or IMAP/SMTP, you receive, read, write, and send your email from a mail client like Outlook or Mac Mail. The key differences are that, with webmail and IMAP, a copy of your email (coming, going, and filed) stays on the mail server, whereas with POP, you typically download a copy of your email to your computer, and it is immediately (or soon thereafter) deleted from the email server.

Traditionally, people had one computer, sent their email via SMTP, and received it via POP. A copy of sent mail would be kept on your computer, and received mail, once received on your computer, would be deleted from the mail server.

What we find now is that folks want access to all of their email (received, sent, and filed) on their desktop, their laptop, their iPhone/BlackBerry/smartphone, and even on their local Internet café computer. This is where IMAP excels, and this is why IMAP is becoming increasingly popular.

So, how do you get IMAP?

Well first, you need a mail server that supports it and will hold your email for you. Unfortunately, Shaw residential (@shaw.ca) does not offer IMAP yet, but Shaw business, Telus, Hotmail, and Gmail all do. So if you have an @shaw.ca email address, you might want to forward your mail to a Hotmail or Gmail account to get IMAP support.

Second, you need a mail client that supports it. That part is easy because all the popular ones do: Outlook, Outlook Express, Windows Live Mail, Mozilla Thunderbird, Entourage, and Mac Mail.

Third, you need to set up your mail client to use IMAP:

- Create a new "account" choosing "IMAP" as the type
- Enter your mail server's IMAP and SMTP server addresses
- Enter your mail username and password
- Set up folders to hold your sent, deleted, and filed mail

You can repeat this third step on more than one computer and they'll all stay synchronized.



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