


How to Choose the Right Email Hosting Service for Your Business

Evaluating Solutions, Providers & Alternatives



Table of Contents

Essential Terminology	3
What Do You Need in an Email Hosting Service?	6
Criteria for Evaluating Email Hosting Services	7
Email Hosting Service Comparison	9
Microsoft Exchange	9
Microsoft 365	9
Google Workspace	10
Zoho Mail	10
Rackspace Email	11
IceWarp	11
ProtonMail	12
Hushmail	12
Horde	13
Kerio Connect	13
Questions to Ask Email Hosting Providers	14
Popular Email Alternatives	15
So, You've Found the Right Hosting Service — What's Next?	16



Whether you run a small business or an international enterprise, email is undoubtedly essential to your business communications.

Despite the rising popularity of social media, instant messaging, texting and other electronic forms of communication, email remains dominant, with Statista estimating that by 2023, we'll be sending more than [347 billion emails per day.](#)

Given the important role email plays in how we communicate, it's vital that you find an email hosting service that can support the needs of your organization. We've put together this comprehensive guide — including key terminology, criteria for evaluation, popular hosting services and email alternatives — to aid in that search.



Let's get started.



Essential Terminology

Before we dig in, let's set the stage by reviewing some terminology.

Email Server

An email server, also known as a mail server or an email server solution, is a computer system that acts as the main point of distribution through which all email is sorted, routed and delivered. Email servers achieve this using standard email protocols, such as Simple Mail Transfer Protocol, Internet Message Access Protocol and Post Office Protocol 3. Email servers can be either on-premises or cloud-based. Popular examples of email servers include Microsoft Exchange Server and Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365) and Google Workspace; Exchange is on-prem, whereas Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace are cloud-based.

To simplify things, think of an email server as being analogous to the post office or even your friendly neighborhood mailman.

Email Hosting Service

An email hosting service, also known as an email hosted service, is an internet hosting service that operates mail servers. In other words, a hosting service is what enables you to access and utilize an email server. Without getting too granular, there are three primary types of hosting service: self-hosting, shared hosting and third-party hosting. For the purposes of this eBook, we'll focus on third-party hosting; for a more in-depth look at email hosting services, we recommend that you read our [blog post](#) on the subject.



Email Hosting Provider

As its name would imply, an email hosting provider is any company that provides email hosting services by renting out email servers to customers. Email hosting providers are also commonly referred to as email providers or mailbox providers. To extend the physical mail analogy, you can think of an email hosting provider as being similar to a postal service agency or company, such as USPS, UPS, FedEx or DHL.

Email Client

An email client, also known as an email reader, refers to a computer program that provides the interface through which you access, view and manage emails. Popular examples of mail clients include Microsoft Outlook and Gmail. In physical mail terms, the email client is basically equivalent to your mailbox or P.O. box.



What Do You Need in an Email Hosting Service?

The search for the right email hosting service should begin with determining your organization's needs and business objectives. Some things to consider when browsing different services:

- ✓ What are your budgetary constraints?
- ✓ What are your security requirements?
- ✓ Do you need antivirus or anti-malware software or spam filtering?
- ✓ Are you subject to any industry regulations, privacy laws or other legislation?
- ✓ Do you want calendaring and scheduling capabilities?
- ✓ Do you require built-in instant messaging?
- ✓ Do you require third-party compliance archiving?



Once you have a clear sense of what you need and what it is you're looking for, you're ready to move on to the next step.

Criteria for Evaluating Email Hosting Services

With so many email hosting services on the market today, each with their own extensive feature set, trying to decide which one is right for your organization can seem daunting. Rather than try to familiarize yourself with every capability or integration under the sun, we've put together this list of the most important evaluation criteria to help guide your search:

Security

From end-to-end encryption and two-factor authentication to antivirus software and spam filtering, your email hosting service should provide you with the tools you need to keep your data safe.

Availability

For email hosting services, significant downtime isn't just a red flag — it's a major issue. According to research from [Acronis](#), nearly 80% of companies estimate downtime costs them at least \$20,000 per hour or more. A quality hosting service should guarantee at least 99.9% of uptime and availability.

Flexibility

Depending on the size and scale of your organization and your specific business needs, you might not require every single feature that a hosting service has to offer. Look for a service that allows you to be flexible and to choose which features you need and which ones you don't.

Storage

There's nothing worse than a cluttered inbox. In addition to basic mailbox storage, an email hosting service should also offer archival storage space, so you can keep your inbox clean while still holding onto important messages. That said, even the best hosting service will come with storage limits; if your archiving needs exceed storage limits, you might want to invest in an email archiving platform.

Size Limits

Most email hosting services impose some sort of size limit on messages sent with attachments. Although this might not be an issue for some organizations, if your organization regularly exceeds those size limits, you might want to look for a service that also offers a file sharing tool for larger files.

Custom Domains

Although this might not be a must-have for every organization, the ability to create email accounts using your company's website domain address is an added bonus.

Ease of Use

It shouldn't take hours of training to get your employees up to speed on how to use your new hosting service — beyond a few basic pointers, it should be intuitive right out of the box. To that end, look for a hosting service with an interface that's easy to use and understand.

Support

Not every organization has the means to hire a full-time systems administrator just to manage their email hosting service. For that reason, we recommend that you look for an email hosting service and provider that can offer round-the-clock support so that you're never without coverage.

Reputation

A hosting provider's reputation can tell you a lot about the quality of their hosting service, how they run their business and whether they're trustworthy.

We'll talk more about the last item on this list — reputation — in just a bit. For now, let's move onto our email hosting service comparison.

Email Hosting Service Comparison

Without any further ado, let's look at some of the most popular email hosting services on the market today

Microsoft 365

For those who want all the benefits of a Microsoft Exchange Server without any of the challenges associated with an on-premises email server, look no further than [Microsoft 365](#).

Technically speaking, Microsoft 365 is a collaboration and productivity application suite, one that boasts an impressive array of features, including business email via Exchange Online and the Outlook email client. Other capabilities include cloud storage, word processing, video conferencing and calendaring, making Microsoft 365 an enticing option for businesses in need of a full-service solution.

Microsoft 365 users have their choice of three editions — Microsoft 365 Business Basic, Microsoft 365 Business Standard and Microsoft 365 Business Premium. Business Basic starts at \$5 per user, per month; Business Standard starts at \$12.50 per user, per month; and Business Premium starts at \$20 per user, per month. All three require an annual commitment.



Google Workspace

Just about anything that can be said about Microsoft 365 can also be said about [Google Workspace](#): It's a collaboration and productivity application suite, offers a robust and innovative feature set that includes business email via Gmail, and is an ideal option for any organization looking for more than just your standard hosting service.

Also similar to Microsoft 365, Google Workspace users have their choice of three editions: Business Starter at \$6 per user, per month; Business Standard at \$12 per user, per month; Business Plus at \$18 per user, per month; and Enterprise with pricing available upon request. For a more detailed breakdown of the similarities and differences between Google Workspace and Microsoft 365, we suggest you take a look at our [comprehensive guide](#).

Zoho Mail

Zoho, an up-and-coming software company best known for the Zoho Office Suite, offers secure email hosting in the form of Zoho Mail. Zoho mail offers enterprise-standard compliance and security through email encryption, two-factor authentication, single sign-on, malware detection, spam filtering, DOS and DDOS control and more. [Zoho Mail](#) also boasts other exciting features, including custom domains, social media-style conversations for enhanced collaboration, built-in email retention and eDiscovery capabilities, mobile access and an intuitive, easy-to-use control panel.

Zoho Mail users have their choice of Mail Lite at \$1 per user, per month or Mail Premium at \$4 per user, per month. Those interested in accessing Zoho's complete communication suite, which includes Zoho mail and online office apps, should consider Workplace, which starts at \$3 per user, per month and includes an online word processor, presentation software, instant chat communications and more.

Rackspace Email

[Rackspace Email](#) is an affordable, cloud-based email hosting service designed with small businesses in mind. For just \$2.99 per user, per month, you get custom domains, robust spam and virus protection, a 100% uptime guarantee, 25GB mailboxes and more. Rackspace also offers round-the-clock support and a dedicated team of experts to help simplify migration and onboarding.

Those looking for even more storage and additional capabilities may want to consider Rackspace Email PLUS. For \$3.99 per mailbox, Rackspace Email PLUS users get access to 30GB online storage (per user), desktop file synchronization, mobile syncing for email, calendars and contacts and Rackspace's online doc and spreadsheet editor.

IceWarp

Perhaps the biggest selling point of [IceWarp](#) — a self-proclaimed “fully featured Exchange alternative” — is that it's less than half the cost of Microsoft Exchange. For that low cost, you get access to an impressive array of collaboration applications, including business-class email and calendaring, instant messaging functionality and document storage. IceWarp's browser-based webmail client boasts everything from custom domains and multi-layered security to GDPR-compliant login settings and smart attachments. With all of that said, prospective IceWarp users should be mindful of its vague security and privacy policies and limited set of administrative tools, which can interfere with ease of use.

IceWarp users have their pick of three editions: IceWarp Lite at \$2.50 per user, per month; IceWarp Standard at \$3.90 per user, per month; and IceWarp Professional at \$7 per user, per month. IceWarp also offers server-hosted subscription and license plans, which are available upon request.

ProtonMail

If email security is the top priority for your organization, [ProtonMail](#) could be your best bet. Developed by researchers at CERN and based in Switzerland — a country known for its strict privacy laws — ProtonMail provides robust data security at no cost to you. ProtonMail uses open source cryptography to create a secure email system with E2EE and privacy standards so strong that the company itself can't decrypt your messages.

With data centers located in a nuclear bunker under 1,000 meters of granite, ProtonMail is just as dedicated to hardware-level security as it is to software-level. Each server within ProtonMail's datacenter consists of fully encrypted hard disks with multiple password layers. For all that ProtonMail offers in terms of security, it falls short in other areas; ProtonMail does not offer as robust a feature set as other email hosting services on this list. That said, ProtonMail's interface is similar to Gmail's, meaning it's easy to use and, depending on which edition you choose, you can get priority support, custom domains and unlimited messages, folders and labels.

ProtonMail comes in four editions: the free version; ProtonMail Plus at 5 EUR per month; ProtonMail Professional at 8 EUR per month; and ProtonMail Visionary at 30 EUR per month.

Hushmail

Fans of ProtonMail might also be interested in [Hushmail](#), a free encrypted email service that uses OpenPGP standards. Hushmail enables users to both send and read secure emails from recipients using any webmail client; it also enables users to add security questions to outgoing emails sent to non-Hushmail users.

Hushmail's security policy revolves around simplicity — simple to use, simple to understand and simple to secure. Based on that principle, it takes only a few minutes to create and set up a Hushmail account. Once you've set up your account, you can access Hushmail via the company's desktop webmail and native iPhone app, or through a support desktop or smartphone email application.

The basic version of Hushmail is available for free, however, the company does offer six paid versions for different use cases, including Small Business, Healthcare, Law and Nonprofits. These paid versions offer additional features such as custom domains, dedicated customer support, email archiving, mobility and administrative tools.

Horde

[Horde](#) is a fully open source webmail client and “enterprise-ready, browser-based communication suite.” Although its functionality isn’t quite as advanced as Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace, it does offer more productivity features than the traditional webmail client, including address book, calendaring and event reminders, as well as advanced access controls for more granular user permissions. At the exceptionally low cost of free, Horde Groupware Webmail edition is a suitable option for businesses on a budget.

Kerio Connect

[Kerio Connect](#) is a software suite featuring business email, instant messaging, calendar applications and more. Users have their choice of on-premises deployment or partner-hosted cloud environment and, according to parent company GFI Software, Kerio Connect takes as little as 10 minutes to install and deploy. Kerio Connect offers many of the same collaboration tools as Exchange, including email integration with calendars and scheduling, contact and task management, notes and instant messaging.

Kerio Connect also comes with an intuitive user interface, robust security features including SSL encryption and S/MIME and native archiving and backup capabilities. All of that said, Kerio Connect does lose points for its reportedly poor customer support, slow upgrade cycle and inconsistent antivirus software and spam filtering. Prospective buyers should note that Kerio Connect is priced according to the number of users within an organization; full pricing information can be found [here](#).

Questions to Ask Email Hosting Providers

As we've already mentioned, an email hosting provider's reputation can tell you a great deal about how they run their business, including whether they value their customers' time and whether they'll be a good fit for your organization.

To that end, it's just as important to evaluate the hosting provider as it is to evaluate the hosting service. After all, the email provider is the one responsible for running the email server and hosting service and will be on the hook should anything go wrong.

When evaluating different vendors, ask the following:

- ✓ What's your uptime record?
- ✓ How does your team handle customer support?
- ✓ Which email clients do you support?
- ✓ How does your company protect against phishing, malware, ransomware and other threats?
- ✓ What are your storage limits?
- ✓ Who owns the email data?
- ✓ How difficult would it be to bring over my emails if I were to switch to your hosting service?
- ✓ How difficult would it be to bring over my emails if I were to switch from your hosting service to a different hosting service?
- ✓ Do you have any existing clients we could talk to about your service?
- ✓ Does your product include email archiving?
- ✓ Do you support third-party email archiving?

Popular Email Alternatives

Although email remains the preferred form of communication for most organizations, it does come with certain limitations — email is prone to security risks, can feel impersonal, doesn't encourage collaboration and so on. For these and other reasons, a growing number of businesses are choosing to supplement their email hosting service with other communication platforms.

These email alternatives fall into four general categories:

- ✓ Collaborative Platforms
- ✓ Project Management Tools
- ✓ Messaging Applications
- ✓ Intranet Options

Note that, depending on the platform, there may be some overlap between these categories — for example, one system might be both a collaborative platform and a project management tool. For a comprehensive list of popular email alternatives on the market today, check out our [blog post](#) on the subject.

So, You've Found the Right Hosting Service — What's Next?

Look for the Right Archiving Solution to Go with It

We appreciate you taking the time read through our guide to email hosting services and hope it's brought you closer to finding the right one for your business. Before you go, we wanted to take a moment to talk about something important: email archiving.

Email archiving is essential for organizations of all sizes for a number of reasons, including storage and knowledge management, business continuity and disaster recovery, regulatory compliance and so much more. You'll note that many of the hosting services we've covered in this eBook offer some form of built-in archiving capability, though these are often insufficient to support the needs of a growing business. That's why, once you've selected an email hosting service, the next step is to find an archiving solution to go with it.

Here at Intradyn, we offer a comprehensive archiving solution that can handle not only your email archiving needs, but your text/SMS message and social media archiving needs, as well. With over 12 years in the eDiscovery and archiving industry (that's 243 billion emails — and counting!), we've earned a reputation as an industry-leading archiving solutions provider.

Don't take our word for it: See for yourself what Intradyn is capable of in this **free, on-demand demo**.

Or, if you'd like to speak to one of our archiving specialists directly, don't hesitate to **contact us** today.

We look forward to showing you what Intradyn can do for you.