

Requirements for Access to the Internet, Email and your Web Hosting Package

Introduction

This document gives a brief outline of what you need to get started on the Internet and how your Web Hosting package is accessed. It is orientated towards PC users, but the principles should hold true if you are using something else (e.g. Mac or Linux).

The Components

A Computer
Dial-Up Access
An email Account
A Web Hosting Package

A Computer

We'll assume this is not a problem – after all, you are probably reading this document on a computer screen!

Dial-Up Access

If you intend to use a conventional telephone line to connect to the Internet you will need a computer equipped with a modem. Most modern computers come with a built-in modem, so in most cases all you need do is plug the modem into your phone point.

You now need a Dial-Up Account. This will be provided by an Internet Service Provider (ISP), such as Freeserve, BT or Virgin.

The Dial-Up Account allows you to connect to the Internet. You do this by dialing (using your Modem) a number provided by your ISP. The ISP's computers are permanently connected to the Internet, so once you have connected to the ISP you have a connection to the Internet.

OK, so a Dial-Up Account allows you to connect to the Internet. How do you set up an account BEFORE you have Internet access? ISPs may distribute setup CDs (e.g. Freeserve give away CDs in Dixons, Currys etc.), or you may have a new PC which comes pre-installed with setup software. This software will allow you to register with the ISP, create an account and configure your computer to dial the ISP when you require an Internet connection.

The key information for your Dial-Up Account is:

- Telephone Number – this is the number your modem will dial to make a connection
- Username – this identifies your account with the ISP
- Password – verifies that you are who you say you are

Once you have a Dial-Up Account you can use your web browser (e.g. Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator) to visit websites.

Email Accounts

Most ISPs provide you with at least one Email account along with your Dial-Up Access.

How Does Email Work?

This is the very brief version:

Mail is passed between Mail Servers. These are computers which are permanently connected to the Internet, and their sole task is to send and receive emails.

You will usually use two mail servers:

- The outgoing (sometimes referred to as the SMTP) server. When you send an email you send it to this server. It then looks at the destination email address to work out which mail server it needs to send the email to. It then attempts to send the message to that server.
- The incoming (sometimes referred to as the POP) server. This receives emails addressed to you.

You will probably have email software (for instance Microsoft Outlook) installed on your computer. When you send an email from Outlook, the first thing it does is establish a connection to the Internet (using the Dial-Up connection to your ISP). It then connects to your SMTP server and passes the email to it. It then disconnects from the Internet – the SMTP server now takes over and passes the message on to the recipient's POP server.

When you receive email, Outlook would connect to the Internet again. It would then connect to the POP server and take from it any new email messages. It can then disconnect from the Internet, allowing you to read your emails 'offline'.

Email Settings

You will normally be given your email settings when you create an account with an ISP. Key information is:

- Email address – your unique address e.g. me@mysite.com
- SMTP server name – e.g. smtp.freemove.net
- POP server name – e.g. pop.freemove.net
- POP server username – allows you to connect to the POP server and retrieve the correct email messages (remember, each mail server may be used by thousands of people, so the username uniquely identifies you)
- POP server password – confirms your identity.

There is normally some correlation between dial-up, email and mail server settings. For instance (hypothetical case):

- Dial-Up Account Name: bloggs.freemove.co.uk
- Dial-Up Password: abc123
- Email Address: fred@bloggs.freemove.co.uk
- POP Username: bloggs.freemove.co.uk
- POP Password: abc123

This may explain why it seems that you are entering the same information twice (e.g. usernames and passwords), but they are for two different parts of the jigsaw puzzle (e.g. dial-up and email access).

Your email software is usually configured by the ISP's setup program, but at the very least you should be given the information listed above – this will help you set up your email software correctly.

Once configured, you should have the ability to send and receive emails.

The Web Hosting Package

The Package comprises:

- Space on a Web Server (A computer permanently connected to the Internet and capable of 'serving' web pages to visiting surfers).
- Use of a POP mail server

The Hosting Package may give you more facilities (such as one or more database, scripting languages and so on) which are not relevant here.

When you buy the Hosting Package, you will normally buy a Domain Name with it. This is a 'pointer' to your website. In other words, when someone types www.mysite.com into their web browser, the domain name mysite.com contains information about the location of your web server. The browser can therefore find the web server, which serves up the requested web page.

Uploading Files to your Hosting Package

Normally, you would create your web pages using software such as Frontpage or Dreamweaver (or one of the hundreds of other web page editors available). The mechanics of creating web pages is beyond the scope of this document, but once they have been created they need to be copied (or uploaded) to the web server.

Most uploads are carried out using FTP (File Transfer Protocol). Some software (such as Dreamweaver) has built-in FTP capabilities, so you can upload your files directly. If your software does not have FTP capability you will need a separate FTP program (such as CuteFTP, or WS_FTP).

Note: Microsoft Frontpage uses a mechanism which allows you to access and edit your web pages directly on the web server, so you don't need separate FTP software.

When you buy your Hosting Package you are given instructions on how to make an FTP connection to your Web Server. The key information is:

- FTP Host Address – the name of the web server (e.g. <ftp.mysite.com>)
- User Name – Determines which areas of your website you have access to (usually all of it)
- Password – confirms your identity

Enter this information in the appropriate place in your FTP software and you should be able to connect to your web server and upload/download files.

POP Email

Your Hosting package also includes POP Email facilities. This allows you to control what happens to incoming email.

Explanation:

Your ISP account is bloggs.freeseerve.co.uk

Your ISP email address is fred@bloggs.freeseerve.co.uk

Your website is called www.mysite.com

Your email software is set up to retrieve emails sent to fred@bloggs.freeseerve.co.uk

How do you retrieve emails sent to sales@mysite.com, or webmaster@mysite.com ? Email sent to any address @mysite.com will arrive at your Web Server. How do you get at it?

There are two ways of doing this:

- Redirection
- POP Mailboxes

Redirection

This is the easier of the two to set up, and probably the more flexible solution. You can set up Email Redirects in your Hosting Package. In very simple terms you can tell the Hosting Package to send emails addressed to, say, sales@mysite.com to fred@bloggs.freeseerve.co.uk. You could send emails addressed to webmaster@mysite.com to the same address or a completely different one.

This solution is flexible because it allows you to change ISPs (and therefore email addresses) without any disruption – you just change the Redirects to point at your new email address.

POP Mailboxes

These work in exactly the same way as the POP mailbox supplied by your ISP. Your Hosting Package allows you to set up a number of POP mailboxes (the exact number depends on your Hosting Package but it is generally 50 or greater).

For instance, you may set up a 'sales' POP mailbox. All emails sent to sales@mysite.com would be delivered to this mailbox. In order to retrieve it you need to configure your mail software (e.g. Outlook) to access the mailbox.

When you set up the POP mailbox you supply three key pieces of information:

- The account name (e.g. sales@mysite.com)
- A username
- A password

Note that these are the same three pieces of information your ISP gives you when you create an account. You therefore have sufficient information to set up your email software:

- Outlook Express allows you to set up several POP mail accounts – just copy the one set up for your ISP and change the POP mail settings
- Eudora – ditto
- Outlook (not Express) – you can set up just one mail account, but you can set up several 'profiles', each with a different set of mail parameters. Simply copy your existing profile and change the POP settings

You can mix-and-match both methods (i.e. have some POP mailboxes and some redirects), but a single account can either be redirected or be a POP mailbox, not both.

Outgoing Email

Normally, you still use your ISP's SMTP server to send email. Some, but not many, Hosting Packages provide an SMTP server, but there is normally no need for this – the ISP's server will do fine.

You can use scripts on your website which send emails (for instance, the script may email the contents of an online form to you). These scripts use SMTP servers provided by the Web Host, but those servers are not usually available for use by you directly.