

Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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Lets Talk E-mail

Probably just about everyone would agree that the easiest way to keep in touch with friends and family is to pick up the phone and call. But, unless you have free long distance service with your cell phone, Skype, magicJack (\$20 a year), or some other program, that can get expensive. So, what's the next best alternative? How about e-mail? If you have an Internet account you're good to go. Now the question becomes, do you want to do it the easy way, or the other way? There's going to be some who will disagree with what follows, that's OK. Not everyone uses Google to find what they're looking for on the Internet.

If you have an Internet account with Cox, SBC/ATT Global, Arkansas Net, or some other Internet Service Provider (ISP) that will allow you to use Outlook Express to send and receive e-mail, why aren't you using Outlook Express? You already have the program on your computer, it's part of the operating system and has been for years. If you have a new computer with the Windows Vista operating system, the program is called Windows Mail (same program, different name).

If you're not using Outlook Express to work e-mail then you're doing it the other way, the Web mail or some alternative e-mail program way. It's surprising the number of people with high speed Internet service who are doing it the other way because they weren't told they could use Outlook Express.

To use Web mail you have to have access to the Internet, go to a Web site, log in with a user name/e-mail address and a password, and then go to the area of the site where you can work your e-mail. Once in the e-mail area of the Web site you can read, write, reply to, forward, print, delete, save, and do most of the other standard e-mail operations. You can even create an address book. But, what you need to understand is that all your information does not reside on the hard drive in your computer. All your e-mail information is stored on a hard drive in someone else's computer located somewhere in the world. Since you probably can't change the way their program works there might be some things you can't do. Also, all of the information you might want to e-mail does not reside on their site and this can create unnecessary hustle. Then there's the never ending stream of advertisements flashing on and off trying to distract you from the task at hand, reading your e-mail. Here's the sixty four thousand dollar question. Does the e-mail service you are using sensor or filter your e-mail? There are a number of Internet

Service Providers filtering their customers' e-mail in an attempt to keep unsolicited e-mail (Spam) from reaching the inbox. You might think that's a good idea, but you still need to sort through all that junk because sooner or later a good e-mail message is going to be misdirected to the junk mail folder. Here's another situation. You look at an e-mail message in your inbox and can tell it's a good e-mail. But, you can't read the e-mail without clicking on an Open Message link because the program is telling you, "This message was marked as junk and will be deleted in ten days." What do you think is going to happen if you're away on a two week vacation? There's no hard evidence to prove who is or is not doing this, but the companies providing Web mail service appear to be more likely to filter e-mail messages. Here is another question for you. Can you save a copy of the e-mail to the hard drive on your computer and then read the message without connecting to the Internet?

OK, so what's so great about Outlook Express? You are in total control of your e-mail. All of the e-mail you receive, copies of the e-mail you send, and e-mail you save in folders within the program resides on your hard drive. All of the contacts in your address book reside on your hard drive. A copy of an e-mail that contains important information you want to keep long time can be easily sent to a folder in My Documents. Now when you back up the information in My Documents to a CD, that important e-mail message will be included. The other tremendous advantage to using Outlook Express is the ability to set up multiple accounts. Most ISP's will allow you to have more than one e-mail account (address). These multiple e-mail addresses along with free e-mail addresses from companies like Google (Gmail) can all be set up in Outlook Express. When you open Outlook Express the program will retrieve the e-mail from all of the accounts and display it in the Inbox. How easy can it get?

If you don't like unsolicited e-mail (Spam), turn off the Preview Pane.

For Windows Vista Users

Service Pack 1 (SP1) for Windows Vista will probably be released some time this month. I don't know if it will be offered as a separate update or included as part of the normal monthly Windows Update. As with any large upgrade, don't be too eager to download and install. It has already been determined that the upgrade will break a few programs.

There will be a four hour Introduction to Vista class starting on March 24, 10 a.m. to noon.

The first full eight hour Basic Computing for Vista class will begin on May 13, 10 a.m. to noon.

If being able to post electronic notes on your computer would make life easier, here is a free program you might want to check. The name is Stickies and you can read all about it at www.zhornsoftware.co.uk

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor. There has been a significant increase in the number of people taking advantage of this service. If everyone arrives during the first hour there will probably be a wait.