

xp workshop



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Improve your Outlook

Outlook XP offers a host of improvements, including enhanced scheduling and contact management tools, all wrapped up in a polished interface. Munir Kotadia takes a look at the additions and gives some tips for better data control

People connect to the internet for a variety of reasons, but long before the modern web existed the internet infrastructure was being used for sending and receiving emails. It's hardly surprising, then, that applications handling email traffic have become the most common pieces of software on the modern PC.

Microsoft's Outlook – a meatier version of the free Outlook Express – may not be the fastest, most reliable or secure email application, but it is certainly the most popular one for this purpose and seems unlikely to be challenged by a competitor in the foreseeable future.

Thankfully, Outlook has changed significantly from its initial launch in 1996 and grown into an incredibly useful tool for managing contacts and diary planning as well as handling email traffic.

Outlook's strength comes from its ability to cross-reference information from its email messages, contacts list and diary information, giving users the kind of flexibility and power available in specialist sales contact management software.

Here we take a look at some of the facilities offered by Outlook XP, aka Outlook 2002, which is available singly or as part of the Office XP suite.

Hoarders and obliterators

There are two extreme types of email users – hoarders and obliterators. Hoarders hate to delete emails and usually have thousands of messages in their inboxes which are rarely (if ever) read more than once. Obliterators are the opposite: they refuse to leave a read email in their inboxes. As soon as a message arrives, it is read and promptly deleted.

All email users have either hoarding or obliterating tendencies, but neither extreme is particularly healthy. How many emails are there in your inbox? If you have less than 10 you're an obliterator, more than 1,000 and you're a hoarder.

Although there is no right or wrong when it comes to email management, both of these extremes in cyber behaviour will cause problems that could be avoided by using some of the email management tools built into Outlook.

Hoarders will find that the sheer number of emails contained within their inboxes will make Outlook slow down. The application itself will take longer to start up and the time taken to open a new message or reply to a received message will increase significantly.

The worst thing for an obliterator is to receive an email that they don't want to delete immediately. They often kick themselves because they have deleted a message that contained important information which is now lost.

The best solution is to reach a happy compromise by keeping your inbox light, without permanently deleting everything to achieve that goal. To avoid your system slowing down without becoming an obliterator, use Outlook's auto-archiving and email filtering facilities.

Auto-archive removes old messages from your inbox and stores them elsewhere in a compressed state. This leaves Outlook free of clutter but also enables you to access old messages when necessary.

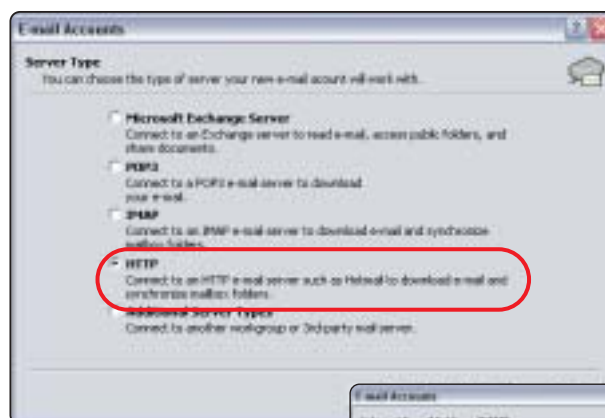
To change archive settings on your inbox, right-click on the inbox icon in the Outlook Shortcuts Bar on the left of the screen (activate with View, Outlook Bar). Click on properties and choose the AutoArchive tag. This will allow you to decide how long to keep messages in the inbox before moving them to the archive folder.

Collecting webmail via Outlook

You don't have to use a browser to check your Hotmail (or any other web-based email) account. It's a straightforward process to access your Hotmail account using Outlook.

This enables you to download all your email messages and then log off while you compose replies. Apart from reducing your phone bill, allowing Outlook to manage your web-based email means not having to worry about the size of your online inbox because messages are downloaded and stored on your PC.

There's also the added advantage of being able to use Outlook's junk email filtering facilities on your incoming Hotmail. But the best part is that using Outlook to access your webmail account is that it does not affect your ability to use Hotmail while on the move.



1 Choose Tools, Email Accounts then in the box pick 'Add a new Email Account'. Select the fourth option labelled HTTP

2 Insert the details of your account.

A new shortcut will appear in your Outlook Bar displaying emails downloaded from your webmail account



To access archived messages, click on View and choose Folder List. Double-click on 'Archive Folders' and pick Inbox. Now find the message you want. To return to your current Inbox, click on the Inbox icon on your Outlook Bar.

Dealing with spam

Spam is becoming a real pain these days. It's virtually impossible to register for anything online without eventually receiving unwanted emails from that company or its 'partners', regardless of whether you agreed to do so or not. Emails advertising pornographic sites or get-rich-quick schemes are unavoidable.

The best way to deal with this kind of Spam is to activate and continually update Outlook's Junk and Adult content filters.

These filters inspect emails as they arrive and can divert known Junk messages away from your main inbox.

The unwanted messages can be deleted or, depending on your hoarding instincts, archived in a Junk Email folder. To activate email filtering go to the Tools menu and choose Organise, Junk email and click On.

The simple way to add an email to your Junk list is to right-click on the offending message, then pick either 'Add to Junk senders list' or 'Add to Adult Content senders list'. From that point, any further email from that recipient will not reach your inbox.

Although this system works quite well and results in the vast majority of unwanted messages being intercepted,

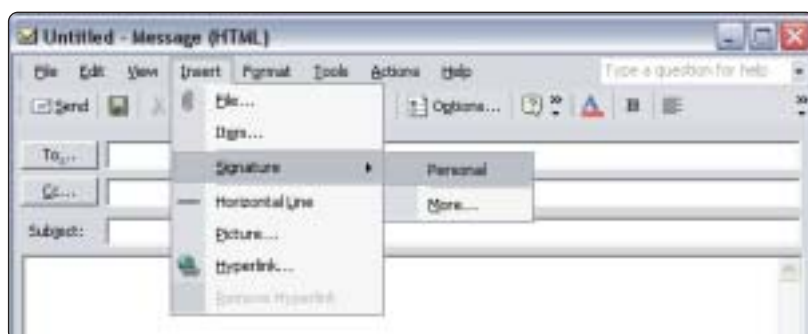
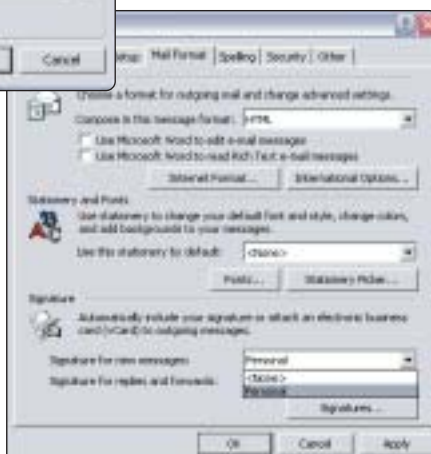
Signing your emails

A signature file is a small amount of text that is automatically added to email messages. Most often, it is used to send basic contact information about the sender such as name, company, telephone number and website. However, it can be used for anything (perhaps a quote or short joke). But just remember, it will be attached to every email you send.



1 To create your own signature file click Tools, Options and select the Mail Format tab. Click the Signatures button and then click New. Decide on a name for your signature, make sure 'Start with a blank signature' is selected and click on Next. Type in your signature text and click Finish

2 You also have the option of only attaching your signature to selected emails. Click Tools, Options and select the Mail Format tab. Next to 'Signatures for new messages' click on the drop-down menu, select None and click ok



3 Now the signature file is saved in Outlook but will not be attached to any emails unless you attach it manually. To attach your signature to an email message, click on Insert and Signature. This will bring up a list of all signatures available. Click on the one you want to use and the content of that signature will be added to your email text

Spam senders regularly adapt their techniques and often send their messages from a new email address each time. So don't expect filtering to eliminate all Spam.

However, what Outlook also makes it possible to do is filter out all emails that

are sent to a specific email address. This is easy enough to set up and provides a far more powerful method of avoiding junk.

The majority of service providers offer their customers a number of email

addresses for each account. If you have a spare email address, then always use the spare one each time you fill in a form, register at a website or enter a competition and so on.

Now create a rule for diverting email sent to your spare email address: choose Tools, Organise. A box will open in the top section of Outlook and ask you to create a new rule. Using the drop-down menu, make a rule that reads 'Create a rule that moves message To (your spare email address) into Junk email'.

Backing up emails

What would you do if all your Outlook information was suddenly destroyed? It's a nightmare scenario that not many people are prepared for. Do you have a backup of all your information? If you do, then how old is it and where is it? If you have made a full backup within the past month and know precisely where the backup is, you are part of a small minority.

It is usually people who have lost all their data in the past that become regular backup fanatics. But it's not necessary to learn the hard way and you'd do well not to let this happen to you. Outlook stores all your information in Person Folder Files and these can be recognised by their PST extension.

To back up everything contained in Outlook you simply need to find your PST files and copy them on to a writable CD. Making a copy of them on your hard drive is not advisable because it leaves the backup as vulnerable as the original and therefore just wastes space. The safest method is to store your backup CD in a different building altogether. That way, even if your PC was completely destroyed by fire, flood or other random disaster the Outlook data would remain safe.

To find and back up Outlook's Personal Folder Files first close down Outlook, then go to the Start menu and choose Search, Files or Folders. Type '*.PST' into the Search box to bring up all files with the PST extension and then copy these files on to CD.

Sending invitations

Having a combined contacts list, calendar and email facility makes scheduling a meeting over email very convenient. Whether it's for business or pleasure,

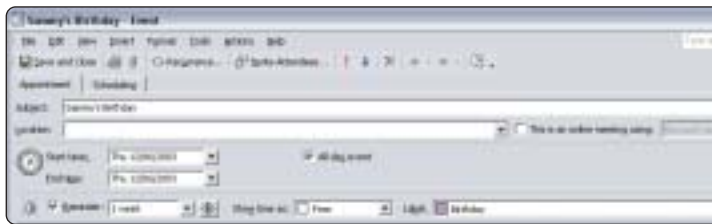
Using the calendar

The Outlook calendar is a powerful alternative to keeping appointments, birthdays or anniversaries in a written diary. A lot of people fear that having spent hours keying names and numbers into an organiser or mobile phone they might lose it through theft or damage.

But the majority of PDAs (personal digital assistants) and newer mobile phones are capable of synchronising with Outlook's contacts and calendar functions which means less

time spent entering information and it also provides a simple solution to backing up your data.

Another advantage over non-electronic calendars is Outlook's ability to remind you of an upcoming event. For example, it's simple to create an entry in the calendar as a recurring event so every week, month or year you will be notified that an important date (regular appointment, birthday, anniversary or whatever) is approaching.



1 In the Outlook Calendar, choose File, New, Appointment. An appointment box will open. Type in the details of the anniversary, click the box next to 'All Day Event' and choose an appropriate reminder time



2 If you want to send a card or buy a present, it might be an idea to set the reminder at least a few days in advance. Finally, click on the button marked 'Recurrence' choose 'Yearly' and click ok. Then save and close the appointment box

this facility is well worth learning about – especially if your friends and colleagues also use Outlook.

In the Outlook Calendar, choose File, New, Appointment. In the appointment box, enter the details of your suggested meeting and its proposed location.

Next, click Invite Attendees and a new line will appear in the appointment box for entering email addresses. Now click on the To box on the left of the new line. You will then be able to pick however many people you want to invite from your contacts list.

Once the invitees have been chosen, click on the Send button and the invitation will leave your system just like an email. All the people receiving your invitation will have the option of either declining or accepting the meeting. If they accept, the appointment will automatically be inserted into their Outlook calendar. Once the invitees respond, your calendar will be updated accordingly.

With the latest version of Outlook, invitees also have the ability to suggest an alternative time for the meeting which,

if agreed on, will be changed on all the calendars.

If your invitees do not use Outlook they will still receive an email with the appointment details but the automatic calendar entry will not function.

Contact management

To make the most of the email and calendar facilities, make sure the information in your Contacts list is correct and up to date. Outlook has facilities to not only store personal details as well as basic information such as email addresses and telephone numbers. This is very useful when using Outlook as a business tool for keeping information on clients, sales contacts and so on.

An interesting function is the ability to bring up a detailed history of all your correspondence with a particular person in your contact list. To do this, go to the Contacts screen, double-click on the contact in question and a box will open containing their details.

Click on the Activities tag and Outlook will search through its email

files (including the archive) and list all messages and invitations that have been sent to and received from that person.

One problem for all Outlook users is how to display your contacts information in a way that is both maximally efficient and also aesthetically pleasing. By default, contacts are listed in 'address cards' form, which works quite well if you have a small number of contacts or all the entries in your contacts list contain the same kinds of information. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. To check the available options, choose View, Current View and pick from the list.

As it is unlikely that all your contacts will have all their details filled in, the Phone List option is a good idea. This displays all your contacts in a list, one on each line.

To change the fields that the contacts are sorted by, Right-click on one of the fields and then pick Field Chooser. A box will open displaying all the available fields. It then allows you to drag and drop different fields to customise the display to your preference. ■