

Desktop Guerrillas

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CORPORATE CLASS MESSAGING, SMALL BUSINESS PRICE

Advanced email, calendaring and task management technologies are no longer just for large enterprises. Improving your business communication is cheaper than you think.

For better or worse, your clients will judge you by your email address. Your business, whether you're an architect or a caterer, may be hugely successful, but if you're asking clients to email you at pete78590@aol.com, it's not going to look like it. For it to reflect the right image, you need an email address that incorporates your company name. And you don't need your own server to do it.

A DOMAIN TO CALL YOUR OWN

If you want the utmost in professionalism, invest in your own domain name. The domain name is that part of an Internet address (to the right of the "@" symbol in an email or after the "www" in a Web address) that identifies an organization or entity. Examples include "yahoo.com" and "ibm.com." Luckily, you don't have to be an IBM to invest in your own domain. Often, for less than a dollar a month, you can purchase a name and email address for your business that will stay with you indefinitely, no matter which service provider you use or how big you grow.

We've found the best value to be godaddy.com. Despite the whimsical name, the company is established, trustworthy, and a bargain. Registering your domain with godaddy.com is only \$8.95 a year and includes email forwarding addresses. Forwarding addresses are just that—they forward email to any account you want, such as an existing Optimum Online, AOL, or Yahoo account. So while you may not want to get rid of billjones@optonline.net, you can safely use bill@jones-systems.com and know it will be immediately shuttled to your true account.

You can choose any name you want that isn't already taken. If your first choice is not available, you may have to be creative with dashes or abbreviations to get your own name. While smith.com might be taken, smithsystems.com may be available. You can also use different suffixes (.net, .org, etc.), but keep in mind that people are used to typing in .com. It may be wise to stick to that.

GET IN SYNC

Once you've given your email address a face-lift, it's time to look at how you can better manage communication within your company. Microsoft Outlook is a full-featured information management tool. Beyond handling your email, it can also organize your schedule, phone numbers, birthdays, anniversaries, account information... you name it, it's in there. If you have Microsoft Office, Outlook may already be on your system. On its own it is a great organizational tool. Where it really shines, however, is in an environment with multiple users. Assistants can prescreen email, phone messages can be taken by anyone in the office, instantly appearing on the recipient's desktop, and meetings can be auto-scheduled, taking into consideration each employee's available dates and times.

At one time, running Outlook with multiple users required the operation of your own server, called Microsoft Exchange. These servers can cost thousands of dollars. Fortunately, it's now possible to purchase individual mailboxes hosted on a shared server. Anyone with a broadband connection can now benefit from something that has become standard in Fortune 500 businesses. Intermedia.net is one of the most affordable? \$9.95 a month buys each user a mailbox and 200 megabytes of storage. (Unless you're exchanging messages with large files, that is enough storage for tens of thousands of emails.) Intermedia.net has all the features of your own server, including the capability to set up work schedules, address books, and tasks for everyone in the office. A real estate office can coordinate closings, for example, and schedule availability of conference rooms. Or each employee can make his or her client list available to others in the office to allow an administrative assistant to create combined mailings. Spam filtering is also part of the service and can be adjusted to any level of sensitivity. It holds these messages in a separate folder for your review, making it easy to check for incorrectly identified spam.

A variety of mobile messaging services can also interface with this service. Have a Blackberry? Not only can it interface with your email, but contacts and tasks will be instantly synchronized between this unit and your Outlook account—all wirelessly, without you ever having to connect it to your computer. There's also a great business card scanner available, which can convert your business cards to Outlook contacts within seconds.

We've found this setup incredibly flexible and expandable. The instant setup was ideal for a newly formed hedge fund firm. Not only did we have them up and running with Blackberries and a shared file area for presentation work, but we were also easily able to migrate their files and email to their dedicated server once it was set up. One educator client has thrown out his organizer, as his schedule and contacts are accessible from any computer with an Internet connection.

Purchasing a domain name and providing the ability for you and your employees to manage information lays an important framework for the successful marketing and operation of your business, and is a great investment in the future success of your company.

Intermedia Exchange Hosting

\$9.95/month per mailbox. Additional options available, including Blackberry support. www.intermedia.net

GoDaddy.com Domain Names

\$8.95/year for .com, .net, .org including email forwarding. www.godaddy.com

Desktop Guerrillas is an IT consulting firm serving small businesses in Fairfield County. With solutions for the one-man office to the 30-person enterprise, we can help you implement a messaging solution that will work with you now and as you grow.