

You get what you pay for

The Hidden Value of Email

Southwest Cyberport provides many excellent and useful Internet services, from **online backup** to cutting-edge **web-publishing**, not to our mention **LightSpeed** fiber and **SWCP DIRECT** links, even computer repair and tune-ups. But our most important service is the one most taken for granted: **email**.

Email has become a vital means of modern communication. Like a telephone, we often don't realize just how much we depend upon it being there. Some people get antsy about being out of touch in just a few hours. For them, a nice, long vacation without email for a week or so might start out as a great relief but end up like an extended exile to a desert island.

Perhaps it's because the service is so cheap that it's so disregarded. SWCP charges as little as *\$2.50/month* for a secondary email account, and our web-publishing service bundles include a generous number of accounts. And there are plenty of "free" services available online through Google or Yahoo and elsewhere.

However, email is a perfect example of the principle that free isn't always free. There are a significant number of risks and pay-offs inherent in those "free" accounts that you may not recognize which just don't apply in the same way to your SWCP email because of the small fee we charge for the service.



Security matters

When you sign up for an account at Google, your email is handled by the very same servers that handle thousands, maybe millions, of other users. Some of these are doubtless spammers or hackers or worse.

Hackers pose a direct threat everywhere. They might not even seek your information but to use your account to break into others. But what they are up to can effect you directly. For instance, if someone get blacklisted for spam or whatever and blocked, *all* the mail from that domain, including your email, will be blocked too – and you may never even know it.

Occasionally, it will happen that SWCP will be blacklisted for spamming. Usually the spam is unintentional because a user's machine is infected by a virus. When we receive a blacklist notification, we can quickly determine why, often just by looking at overall traffic patterns, notify the user, and clear the problem before it impacts many customers. Many times, the traffic spike will alert us to an infection before anyone else, even the infected customer, is aware.

With big providers and hundreds of servers spread out in huge networks, the whole process can take a lot more time. Plus those providers could care less about excuses from infected parties or helping out a client who doesn't quite get it. They're more likely to cut off service without any explanation at all.

If you've been building up a business depending on your email address, you could be in some serious trouble. For one thing, *everyone* on a blacklisted service, whether guilty or not, is somewhat tainted by it. It can easily raise doubts in potential clients' minds.

Another problem is **latency**. People often count on email moving as fast as light, but there are no guarantees. The speed of email depends on many things, including the load on the servers, the size of the message, and so forth. So if you have to send a file across the office that has to first travel through a server farm in California, there's no telling when it might arrive.

And then there's the question of what happens once your message makes it to the server. Unless encrypted, email is as secure as a postcard – *anyone*

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along the way can read it. Most likely, the “free” email provider will, because the user is not so much a client as a target. Google, for instance, *automatically* parcels out its ads according to keywords in gmail, so you may want to be careful what you joke about.

Other parties are interested, too. Law enforcement, for example: people are busted all the time for emailing inappropriate content. And of course, spies and intelligence agencies, including the NSA, are all very concerned. Thus Google, Microsoft, Yahoo and others are busily encrypting their services, not so much in hopes of preventing spying as to restore users’ confidence and secure it for the company’s use. But with SWCP, encrypted or not, **you own your data**, not us.

We provide even more mail-handling options than free services, for our clients can decide *where* they want their email stored. Like the big companies who retain all messages in the so-called “cloud,” users can either access their Southwest Cyberport mailbox from anywhere – or download email to their own personal device, depending on account preferences.

But in case some crucial message gets lost, SWCP regularly **backs up** the *entire* mail queue on a rotating basis. Thus your messages are preserved for a time, and recoverable if necessary (sometimes for a small fee,) but unlike with Google, you don’t have to worry that every message will be saved regardless.

More service

There’s no question that the big providers offer a lot of enticing services. They do so basically to keep users on their websites longer, seeing their ads, and feeding off the data that people generate to sell them more stuff. That is *not* Southwest Cyberport’s business model. We don’t even have ads for our *own* products on our website. Our idea is to make your Internet experience as pleasantly productive as possible. Our services are provided not to entice you to linger, but to make it easy to do what you want to do.

So we offer powerful **spam filters** that you can customize precisely to the level of protection that is most comfortable for you with **SpamAssassin** and **Spamprobe**. You can **blacklist** people or institutions you don’t want to hear from or make it easy for those you do want to hear from, even filter your mail by keyword. You can have the mail **automatically forwarded** to other accounts. And you can even set up an **automatic reply** for when you’re away.

On our website, we have several **web-based email clients** that you can use. So even if you generally like your email to download, on vacation you can just surf over to **swcp.com** to deal with it as it comes up, and

then download it all once you’re back at work. From there, you can send us **authenticated messages**, so even if you’re hanging out in a cybercafé halfway around the world wanting to make changes to your account, we can be confident it’s really you.

More local

With SWCP, unlike those big impersonal providers, customer service is important. We offer **free yearly computer clean-outs** and free open-source **antivirus programs**. And our **technical support**, over the phone, via email, or face-to-face, is second to none.

We’re all in this together: we’re as dependent on the same systems functioning as our customers, families, and friends – and we can’t do it without you. So when you call us, you won’t be waiting for some geek in India, but chatting with a neighbor who understands.

In that spirit, as we face our twentieth anniversary next year, all of us here at Southwest Cyberport, would like to thank you, our customers, for your support. We will continue to strive to be the best service providers around and to constantly earn your trust. The Internet is a wonderful, crazy, exciting place, and we are delighted to be able to share it with you.

Buyer beware

While you’re online spending money this season, do so safely. Do *not* use **public Wi-fi** if you can help it unless you’re certain of the identity of the network provider, as many hot spots are set up by scammers to capture information. *Do* use your phone connection instead. Don’t store *any* information on public computers either. And you might just want to check that nobody’s looking over your shoulder, too.

Finally, when you do go to buy something, make sure that the web-address begins with “**https:**” not just “**http:**” to be sure of a secure connection. If you download anything, especially free software, check what *else* may be included. Many sites, even reputable ones, may offer things like search-engine taskbars that are little more than malware, so do be careful.



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