

mobilepc

FAST-MOVING COMPUTING

APRIL 2005 **ISSUE 15**

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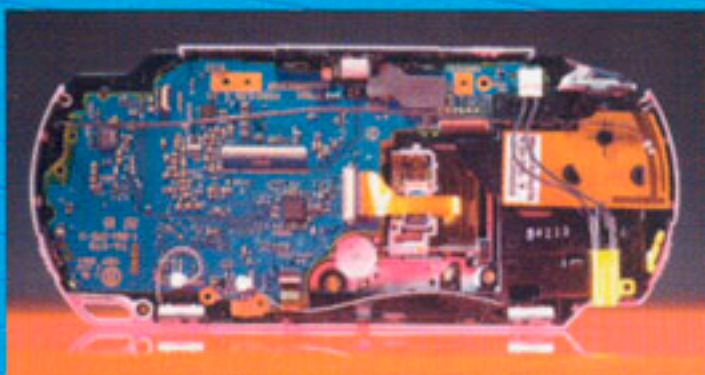


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INTEL CONCEPT PC

I WANT MY SHOE PHONE!

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DITCH YOUR NOTEBOOK

TIRED OF CARRYING YOUR RIG WITH YOU? LEAVE IT AT HOME AND STILL CHECK E-MAIL, RETRIEVE FILES, FIRE UP YOUR OFFICE SUITE, AND MORE! DON'T TRAVEL LIGHT — TRAVEL WEIGHTLESS!

Want to lose 10 unsightly pounds? The joke answer: Cut your head off.

The *Mobile PC* answer: Dump your notebook, power supply, travel bag, spare batteries, and all the rest of that back-breaking bulk. Because even though you can't get much work done without your head (though we know some editors who have tried), you'd be surprised at how much you can accomplish without a notebook weighing you down.

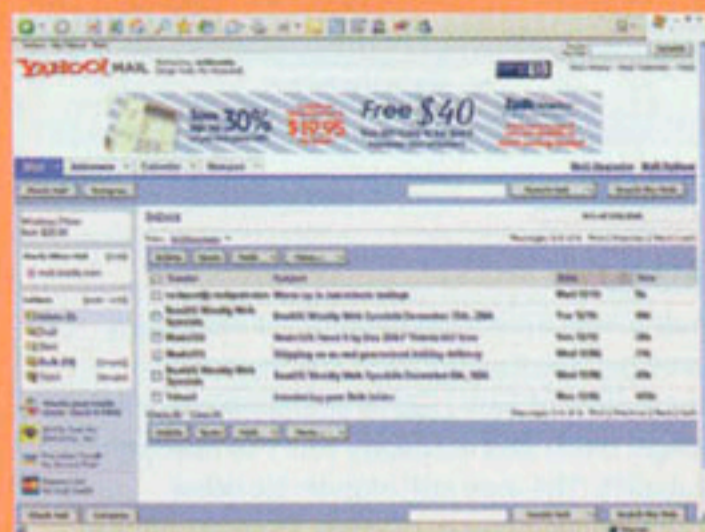
That's because web-connected PCs are everywhere — cybercafés, airport lounges, your home office, a friend's house — and the web is all you need to get to your e-mail, calendar, address book, business documents, and even the very software you left behind. It may sound unsettling at first, leaving your whole computing world just floating around online, but trust us when we say it's a safe, secure, and undeniably convenient proposition. Here are the best ways to travel really light.



BY RICK BROIDA

CHECK YOUR MAIL

Most travelers would sooner do without a change of underwear than forgo e-mail access. Hence the popularity of browser-based e-mail services, which let you peruse your inbox from any web-connected PC. Many services also let you read your POP3 accounts; some let you tap into IMAP accounts as well.



MAIL2WEB

Wanna see a cool trick? Head to the Mail2web site, type in the address and password for any POP3, IMAP, or even Gmail account, and click Check Mail. Presto! There's your mail, just like that.

As if that wasn't handy enough, Mail2web also lets you create your own start page (accessible via an easy-to-remember URL, mail2web.com/yourname), complete with access to unlimited external accounts. It offers secure connections; an address book that can import CSV files and organize contacts into groups; and support

for PDA- and WAP-based access (just in case you've dumped your notebook but not your cell phone).

Perhaps most impressive of all, mail sent via

Mail2web shows up as being sent from whatever account you used to log in, not from an arbitrary or unfamiliar address. This feature alone makes Mail2web the hands-down winner for business users; none of the other services offer this invaluable feature (not for free, anyway). Another nice perk: You can search e-mail using sender or subject as your criteria.

Mail2web also serves up one massively useful tool not found in any other service: instant messaging. Its browser-based chat client can communicate with AOL, ICQ, MSN, and Yahoo users. However, it requires the installation of a Java component, which could be a problem on public machines, and it's not the most novice-friendly applet. (At press time, the IM tool had just debuted, so hopefully Mail2web will iron out the kinks.)

The only real downside to Mail2web is the rudimentary tools provided for composing new mail. You're limited to basic text — no fancy formatting available here. However, you can add up to three separate attachments, each as large as 10MB. That's pretty amazing for a service that, in case we haven't mentioned it, costs nothing. Indeed, we're amazed by almost everything about Mail2web, our new favorite e-mail home away from home.

YAHOO MAIL

At first glance, Yahoo Mail might not blow you away with its features. For instance, its 250MB of e-mail storage can't touch Gmail's 1GB, although it's still a generous amount and probably more than adequate for most users. But when you dig a little bit deeper, you'll see that Yahoo Mail's clean, attractive interface and superlative address book help make it a top contender.

In addition to those megabytes of storage, a free Yahoo Mail account includes spam protection, support for attachments up to 10MB, and access to unlimited POP3 accounts. You can search your inbox and import contacts from Outlook, Palm Desktop, Netscape, and other programs. Yahoo Mail even includes program-specific help links right on the import page, a welcome courtesy.

Instead of importing, however, which brings in only the latest copy of your contacts, you can actually synchronize your desktop contact manager with your Yahoo Address Book. The free Intellisync for Yahoo utility makes this possible; it works with most popular programs, including ACT, Lotus 6.0, Outlook, and Palm Desktop. And the Yahoo Address Book itself is by far the most robust in the group, with features ranging from groups to custom fields to a handy print view.

Upgrading to Yahoo Mail Plus nets you 2GB of storage, an ad-free interface, and the option of sending mail from your preferred — instead of your @yahoo.com — address. Yahoo also offers an attractive small-business solution in the form of Business Mail, a \$9.95-per-month upgrade that includes your own domain name, 10 e-mail accounts, 2GB of storage per account, and POP access.

Yahoo feels a bit weak in the mail-composition department — it lacks extensive formatting capabilities — but that's our only complaint. If you don't need access to IMAP accounts, Yahoo Mail makes for an excellent e-mail surrogate.



Free

www.mail2web.com



Free; \$19.99 per year for Yahoo Mail Plus

mail.yahoo.com

TIPS

LEAVE A TRACE

When you add external e-mail accounts to a browser-based service, make sure you configure them so that messages remain on the server even after you read them. That way you'll still be able to retrieve them normally when you get back to the office or your house.

ALL IN ONE

Juggling multiple mail accounts can be a drag, even with the best e-mail tool. Try forwarding all of your mail, whether it be work or personal, to one central address that you can use to manage all of your messages.

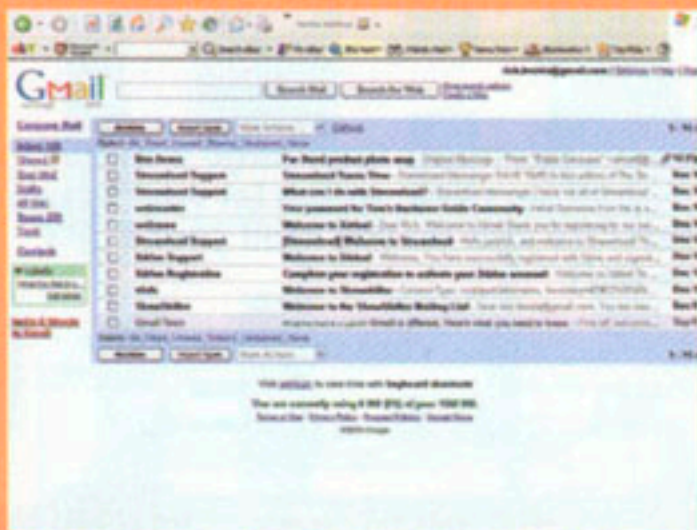
TIPS

KNOW WHERE TO GO
Before leaving on any trip, e-mail a copy of your itinerary and reservation info to your Excite, Gmail, or Yahoo address. Should you need it, it'll be quickly and easily accessible from any web-connected PC.

FAST FAXES

If you use eFax to receive faxes via e-mail, you won't be able to view them remotely unless you install the eFax software — not always an option. However, if you save the eFax attachment to the local hard drive, then change its file extension from .efx to .tif, you should be able to view the document in Windows Imaging.

CHECK YOUR MAIL



GMAIL

Gmail needs little introduction — it's Google's e-mail service that debuted last year to a combination of awe (1GB of searchable e-mail storage, free!) and acrimony (they're *reading my mail?*). The awe still stands: No other service comes close to offering so much storage — especially for free — and Gmail's search and conversation-thread features are second to none.

As for the acrimony, there's no need. Like other services, Google scans your mail to ferret out spam and viruses. It also looks for keywords in order to deliver targeted text ads, much like when you do a Google web search. Is that really so bad? Besides, let's remember the service is free, so Google needs a way



to pay for all of that storage space it's giving you.

To get the most from Gmail, you either have to make it your primary e-mail address or set up your office account to forward to your Gmail address (which could require some IT intervention). That's because Gmail, unlike the other services we reviewed, lacks the capability to retrieve mail from external accounts. (For what it's worth, you can configure Outlook, Outlook Express, or any other POP3 e-mail client to fetch your Gmail mail — which we accomplished quite easily with Gmail's awesome autoconfig tool — but that doesn't do you much good when you're working from a public terminal.)

Indeed, unless Gmail serves as your primary address, you may find it unwieldy. Composing new mail is strictly a raw-text affair; the service offers no font, color, spell-check, or editing tools whatsoever. And outbound messages will, of course, reflect the Gmail account, though you can specify a different reply-to address. Finally, Gmail's Contacts tool needs some tweaking. Although you can import CSV address books produced by the likes of Hotmail, Outlook, and Yahoo, you can't drill into your listings by last name or company name; you're forced to page through the entire address book or do a search. You also can't sort messages by sender, subject, or any other method. All you get is the order received.

These are minor gripes. Gmail is, for the most part, a terrific web-based e-mail solution. If and when Google adds support for external mail accounts, it'll be our first stop when we're out and about.



EXCITE MAIL

Like MSN's ugly stepsister, Excite is an unglamorous portal that provides news, weather, stock prices, and other handy info, all of it customized based on your preferences and location. But while MSN's Hotmail service doesn't afford access to outside POP3 accounts, Excite does, and that's just the tip of its e-mail iceberg.

A free Excite account includes an e-mail address, a commendable 125MB of mail storage, and support for attachments as large as 10MB. You can create an unlimited number of folders for organizing your mail, block mail from any e-mail address or domain, and even set up rule-based filters. Best of all, you can add unlimited POP3



accounts, even going so far as to direct mail from those accounts to specific folders.

Upgrading to Excite Email Gold costs \$19.95 per year and includes 2GB of storage, an ad-free e-mail screen, and a few other perks, but it's probably not necessary for most mobile users. The free account gets the job done. And even the premium service doesn't overcome Excite's handful of limitations, which are minor but noteworthy.

For instance, as much as we like Excite's feature-rich mail composition screen (by far the best in the group), you're stuck using your Excite address for outgoing mail — you can't make it appear to come from one of your POP3 accounts. You can specify a different reply-to address, but the recipient will still see *you@excite.com* in the From field, which can be awkward.

We'd also like to see improvements to Excite's address book, which handles e-mail addresses just fine — and can even import Hotmail, Outlook, and Yahoo address books — but offers little in the way of actual contact management. In addition, Excite's spam filter didn't do a very good job junking junk mail. Even when set to the "medium-high" filter level, it let obvious spam (such as foreign-language gobbledygook) into our inbox.

Still, the price is right, and Excite gives you fast and easy access to your POP3 e-mail accounts, with some generous amenities to boot.