

# California Computer Care

News,  
Views,  
Tips and  
Cool Techniques  
for CCC Members

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We  
speak  
Geek,  
so you  
don't  
have to.

## Web Mail vs Mail Apps

We all have email applications. Popular ones include Apple's *Mail.app*, *Thunderbird*, *Entourage*, *Eudora*, *Outlook Express* and for Windows (and soon for Mac, too) *Outlook*. And, there are dozens more.

As ubiquitous as email applications are, there are many people who don't use them and yet, they still send and receive email on their Macs. How is that possible?

You can't access the internet without an ISP or Internet Service Provider. Comcast, AT&T, Sonic.net, Earthlink, AOL are all ISPs. When you contract with them for internet service, you get several free email accounts. You can use these email accounts if you like; most folks do. Or, you can find your own.

Web mail is the main alternative. Some folks eschew their ISP's email in favor of independent services like *YahooMail*, *GMail*, *HotMail* and others. These services are usually accessed from a web page, not with an email application. That's where the name "web mail" comes from.

Almost all ISPs offer web mail as well. Go to your ISP's home page and you will see a link to click for email. Clicking on that link (and entering your ISP account user name and password) will allow you to access your email there without an email application.

So, is one way better than another? Here is a table showing pros and cons. You choose which you like best.

Feature	Mail Application	Web Mail
Ease of Use	A well designed email app is easy to set-up and behaves in familiar, Macintosh ways. <i>Winner!</i>	No set-up needed. Lack of consistent, Mac-like interface makes web mail harder to use.
Reliability	Mail is stored locally on your Mac and is available even when your internet connection is down. <i>Winner!</i>	Mail is stored on your ISP's computers. Internet connection down? No email for you!
Security	Breaking into a Mac is still almost impossible. <i>Winner!</i>	YahooMail and HotMail have been cracked in the past, though successful attacks are rare.
Speed	Reading and writing emails is as fast as your Mac is capable. <i>Winner!</i>	Limited by connection speed, internet load and ISP's software. Can be very slow ( <i>Earthlink, I'm talking to you!</i> ).
Portability	Your email is only available on computers set up with your special account information.	Available on any computer, with an internet connection and a web browser, anywhere in the world. <i>Winner!</i>
Compatibility	Email applications often have proprietary formats that do not interchange well with other email apps.	Works equally well with all modern web browsers regardless of computer and operating system. <i>Winner!</i>
Customizability	More preference settings allows you to define how the application looks and behaves. <i>Winner!</i>	Locked down with few preference choices.
Best Feature	Your email resides in your Mac giving you full control, accessibility and better security.	Your email is available anywhere you are. Your ISP is 100% responsible for making sure it works all of the time.
Worst Feature	Your email resides in your Mac giving you no access to it anywhere else.	Slow and out of your ultimate control.

## *IMAP: the Best of Both Worlds*

The most common type of email account is a POP\* account. All email accounts from ISPs are POP accounts by default. Most web mail providers also have a POP email option. AOL is the one exception, as we shall see later.

With a POP email account, email sent to you arrives first at your ISP's computer (called the *incoming mail server*) and is held in a temporary mail box until you launch your email application. When you do, your email application contacts the ISP's computer and picks up your email; copying it to your Mac. Then, in most cases, your email application deletes the email from the ISP's computer leaving the email on your Mac as the only copy.

With a web mail account, the web mail provider's computer receives all email sent to you. You then visit their web site, to review and access your email. Nothing is copied to your Mac. So, if you can't get on the internet, you cannot see your new email, cannot review saved mail, sent mail or your address book. You are completely cut off. (Hmm, might not be such a bad thing.)

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\*POP: Post Office Protocol

IMAP: Internet Message Access Protocol

IMAP to the rescue! Some ISPs offer a hybrid alternative. IMAP mail works like this: Your ISP receives and holds incoming email for you. Your email app contacts the ISP's computer and shows you your email. Now, you have a choice. You can leave the email on the ISP's computer, copy it to your Mac and delete it from the ISP or copy it and leave it on the ISP's computer. If you choose the latter, your local copy and the ISP's copy are automatically synchronized whenever you check email. That is the strength of IMAP.

This way, in your email application, mail appears to you like a POP account. You have access to your email anytime. But if you delete or write or send or store an email, the next time your email application contacts the ISP, the email there is altered to be identical to the mail on your Mac. Automatically and almost instantly. This allows you to use multiple Macs, your ISP's web mail access or foreign computers and always see the exact same email. Every new email, every sent or saved email and every deleted email; always identical wherever you are.

AOL works this way if you use their bug filled AOL Desktop application. This is the one good feature of AOL.

Most ISPs do not offer IMAP email. But, if yours does, it is an excellent choice for easy and consistent email access.

## *August Tip* —

Safari version 4 has made a change that might confuse you.

In Safari 3, if you have multiple web page tabs open, you can change your focus from one tab to the next tab (left to right) with this simple keyboard shortcut:

- 1) Hold down the *Command* key and the *Shift* key.
- 2) Tap the } key.

To go backward (right to left):

- 1) Hold down the *Command* key and the *Shift* key.
- 2) Tap the { key.

Safari 4 changes moving from tab to tab (left to right) to this:

- 1) Hold down the *Control* key.
- 2) Tap the *Tab* key.

To go backward (right to left):

- 1) Hold down the *Control* key and the *Shift* key.
- 2) Tap the *Tab* key.

Check your version of Safari by choosing *About Safari* from the *Safari* menu.

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