

POP3 vs IMAP - A Beginners Guide

Should you use POP3 or IMAP? It's a question often asked, so let's discuss the two protocols and the advantages of each.



What are they?

Both POP3 and IMAP are protocols that email services use to receive email, be it to an email client such as Outlook or a mobile device.

POP3 – Post Office Protocol 3 is a protocol that has been around for decades. It's the standard way that a mail service will receive email from a mail server.

IMAP – Internet Message Access Protocol is a protocol that is much newer than POP3 and is used by mail products to view your mail as opposed to actually downloading it.

Your email addresses supplied by J D Web Design support both POP3 and IMAP.

What is the difference?

If you decide to configure your email client or mobile device to connect to your mailbox using POP3 then what happens is that the client or device contacts the mailbox and allows them to download the contents of the Inbox to their own local storage. The mail then will only exist on that local storage and would not be available to download via another client or device.

When using IMAP with an email client or device they will simply connect to the mailbox and display the full mailbox to you without actually downloading the content to local storage. This has the benefit of allowing you to manage your mailbox from multiple email clients and devices and seeing the same content. Remember though, if you don't delete emails you will reach the mailbox limit and get blocked out.

Which one should I use?

Which protocol you decide to use depends mainly on how you will be accessing and managing your email.

If you are simply going to be using one email location then POP3 would be the way to go. This provides a simple service to allow you to download all of your emails to one location managed by you, whether that is a mobile phone, laptop or desktop computer. The mailbox on the server would always be empty or close to it as a result and so you would never need to worry about reaching the limit.

If you are likely to be viewing your mail from multiple locations, clients or devices then it is usually best to use IMAP. Be aware though, you will need to delete emails you no longer need or your mailbox will reach the limit and block you out. Remember if you delete an email using IMAP it is deleted from all devices and the server.

There are several other options you can use, by using combination of the two.

For example, you might have a mobile device you take when you're out of the office so you don't miss an important email but the majority of the time you use a computer at one location. You could set your mobile device to use IMAP so you don't miss any emails while you're out. Then use POP3 on your desktop computer which would then download all the emails when you got back. You would not have to worry about reaching your limit, but still have the convenience of using your mobile device to receive emails while you're out. (If you use this method, just don't forget to shut your email client on your main computer before you leave otherwise it will download to that and will not be able to get them on your mobile device.)

If you would like to get advice on what would best suit you, please feel free to contact me.

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