

Why Running Your Own Mail

Nowadays many individuals, companies and organizations consider that running their own mail server has become an impossible task. They often lack in-house technical resources to configure and run a mail server properly and deal with threats. For these reasons, many decide to outsource their email service to external entities (internet or hosting providers).

However, outsourcing does not come without costs, even when the outsourced service appears to be "free". Hidden costs include:

the (external) internet provider can see the content of all messages

The content of messages may be stored on the internet provider's servers indefinitely. External access to unencrypted emails thus poses clear privacy and confidentiality issues.

The internet provider may be located in a significantly different jurisdiction (country) and thus be subjected to different regulations and obligations.

The internet provider's terms and conditions may allow it to search the content of emails to aid in targeting advertising, which poses even greater privacy and confidentiality problems.

there no longer is control of your own email security and inspection of SMTP transaction logs may be impossible

Server-based encryption and authentication is managed by the internet provider, requiring end-to-end encryption for sensitive communications.

Troubleshooting failed deliveries and other email problems requires interacting with an external support desk. Support desks are sometimes slow to respond. First-line support, in particular, might lack the training and access to fix any but simple problems, requiring escalation and further delays.

sharing a mail server with other organizations can cause delivery issues, for instance when a user at another organization sends spam through that mail server or otherwise misbehaves

When the internet provider fails to detect and block misconduct or is slow to terminate service, the likelihood of problems increases substantially.

The above disadvantages are important. For small organizations that need reliable, confidential email systems, the choice of whether to outsource or not can be a tough one. However, running a secure, spam-filtered mail server is not terribly difficult.

MSDP believes that an in-house mail server remains a viable solution and it should be the preferred one when sovereignty, privacy or confidentiality issues are considered important. While it remains true that there must be a (first line support) system administrator knowledgeable in operating the mail system, this task should not be considered overwhelming. All considered, running your own mail server may turn out to be a very good investment.