

As a Computer Consultant discussing client's systems, programs and computing choices, it often strikes me that Microsoft have created a lot of confusion by using the word "Outlook" in the names of three different email products. This confusion is particularly marked, of course, if I'm providing telephone support on one of the "Outlooks" but the client is talking about one product and I'm thinking of another. There's no point in my asking "which Outlook are you using?" because it would be unreasonable to expect the client to know of all these different animals and to know which one of the three they are using. So, I usually have to ask things like "what does it say on the icon you click to get your email". Thank goodness for remote control support where I can see what the client can see.

So, let's just see if we can clarify the situation:

## Outlook Express



This was the free email program that formed part of the Windows package right up to, and including, Windows XP. It developed into different versions right up to version 6.

Outlook Express was a program installed on the user's computer. It provided the functionality to send and receive emails and to store them on the user's computer. It also had a "newsreader" but I'm not bothered about that as I don't think I ever came across anyone using it. Email programs (also called email "clients") need to be set up with the information relating to the user's email account (such as the names of the email servers, username and password, what type of security there is, and so forth).

Outlook Express was succeeded in 2005 by Windows Mail. Windows Mail came as part of the Windows Vista program. Windows Mail was then superceded by Windows Live Mail. So, for anyone who used Outlook Express in years gone by, the natural successor is now Windows Live Mail. A difference between the two is that the user has to download the Windows Live Mail program (it's part of the free suite of programs called [Windows Essentials](#)). This difference is not caused by technical considerations, but is a result of Microsoft being hauled before the European monopolies authorities. Microsoft had to agree to supply its email program separate from Windows as the bureaucrats decreed that Microsoft had an unfair advantage over other email programs if they installed their own program automatically with Windows. Has it made any difference? I doubt it. It's very rare, indeed, that I come across anyone using a rival product such as [Thunderbird](#).

## Outlook



*Outlook 2013  
logo.*

Like Outlook Express, Outlook is an email program (aka a “an email client”). However, it is not a free product either as part of a version of Windows or as a separate download. It is a paid-for program that is more robust and much better featured than Windows Live Mail. It comes as part of the Microsoft Office Small Business suite of programs or on its own.

[Microsoft Outlook costs about £110](#) when bought on its own.

I don't think I'm sticking my neck out too far if I suggest that Outlook is the most popular email program for organisations. If you are thinking of buying it, it costs the same to buy on its own as the difference in price between the Office Small Business package and the Office Home and Student package. Click this link for a [comparison of Microsoft Office products](#).

## Outlook.com



Then the marketing bods at Microsoft seem to have had a collective brainstorm. They announced a web-based email facility that they chose to call Outlook.com. I have no idea why they chose to call a product after a website and I have no idea why they chose to confuse everybody by using the term “Outlook” again, meaning something completely different this time. See this link for [more information on Outlook.com](#).

So, Outlook.com works like a Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo account in that you access it via a web browser. All you need to know to access your email is your username and password. Accessing email this way has the advantages that you can access your email from any computer and your data is stored on the server so you don't need to back it up. The main disadvantages of web-based email are that it can be slower to access, and the functionality of the program is usually simpler than with an email client. To use the vernacular, web-based email is a bit clunky.

So, there you have it, three different approaches to email, all using the same name.

I'd love to be a fly on the wall of a Microsoft marketing meeting.... on second thoughts, maybe I wouldn't.

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