

Gerald's Column

by Gerald Fitton

This month I shall continue to encourage you to become ISP independent! If my correspondence is anything to go by many of you are in the process of changing from a dial up internet connection to a broadband connection. Please write to me if you think I can give you advice or assistance.

If you have followed this series so far you will be at the point where you need to set up your own desktop computer so that it will send and receive emails using your newly acquired address. Before I do that, for those who have just joined this thread, or forgotten what went before, I shall treat you to a short recapitulation and answer a few questions from my correspondence along the way.

ISP

In order to get on the Internet you need an Internet Service Provider (ISP). My first ISP was Demon. They provided me with the domain name 'abacusline.demon.co.uk', a dial up telephone number and a password. I used this successfully for a decade.

In January this year NTL offered me a broadband connection for just under £18 per month with no installation charges. I telephoned NTL late on Friday afternoon (14th) and by the afternoon of Saturday (15th) I was using my NTL broadband connection to 'surf the net'. NTL are my new ISP and I have cancelled my £11.75 per month payment to Demon.

Modem

NTL provide broadband through their own cable network whereas many other companies such as AoL (my son's ISP) use the BT telephone line. For my £18 per month I have a box called a 'broadband cable modem' which is connected to NTL's cable network. This box is connected to my computer.

Wireless Router

It is possible to make a direct connection between the modem and a computer but the (very good) advice I received from a friend, Tonnie Demarteau, was to place a box called a 'router' between the modem and my computer. One function of the router is to act as a hardware firewall between the nasties which circulate around the internet and my computer. A hardware firewall makes it much more difficult for a nasty to access your computer. I chose a slightly more expensive option than the plain (usually four port) router; I bought a 'wireless router'.

The NTL broadband cable modem and my wireless router are physically close together at the end of the NTL cable but the wireless feature allows me to run my computers from any room in the house without having to run cables between them and the router.

I have been asked about the range of these wireless routers. I have not done any serious systematic range measurements but I can assure you that you will not have a problem.

I have a Personal Digital Assistant (a handheld HP iPAQ h4150) with integral WiFi. I can access the internet using its WiFi facility; the PDA is connected by radio to my router. I walked down the street and at 50 yards I received a signal good enough for streaming video (real time video directly from the internet) to play without a hitch.

I plugged a portable wireless receiver into my neighbour's computer and accessed the internet (in his house) via my wireless router and my NTL modem.

You will not have a range problem.

Security

In answer to another question, if you use a wireless router then you should configure it with some sort of encryption. I have used 64 bit WEP encryption. What this does is to encode the information which is flowing through the aether on the radio waves so that it is much more secure than if you used no encryption.

In an attempt to pre-empt some of my correspondence, I do know that 128 bit encryption is more secure but I found that not only does it slow down the information interchange but also it seems to be more difficult to set up (it shouldn't be and don't ask me why because I don't know why it doesn't work sometimes).

If you need any advice about this WEP encryption then please write to me.

My NTL domain

Together with the cable modem, NTL have given me an NTL domain name. It is 'something_or_other@ntlworld.com' and comes with 50 MB of webspace on their homepages. I don't use this email address nor do I use this webspace. Of course there are mail servers such as pop.ntlworld.com and smtp.ntlworld.com and a password which come with the package. More about this later.

My EasySpace domain

As I have described in earlier issues of Archive, for £25 per year I have bought the domain 'abacusline.co.uk' from EasySpace. This comes with 500 MB of webspace and either 10 or 20 (I still don't know which) email mailboxes such as archive@abacusline.co.uk.

If you are having problems (some people have) buying your domain name (from a hosting company) or setting up your email mailboxes (on the mail server) then please write to me if you think I can clarify anything or assist you.

Webmail

Some of my correspondents have asked me to describe the differences (if any!) between webmail and email. For this example let us suppose that you have a mailbox such as archive@abacusline.co.uk with a hosting company such as EasySpace.

If you know how to use webmail then you can use any browser such as Fresco, Firefox, Internet Explorer, etc, from any computer (which is connected to the internet), anywhere in the world to read the emails in your mailbox and to send emails to anyone with an email address. In answer to another question, you do not need to use the same browser nor the same computer to read your emails. Sometimes I use my PDA, sometimes my laptop and sometimes one of my desktop computers. Sometimes I use my son's computer in his house! My son has a Windows machine, he uses AoL as his ISP and the BT 'phone line whereas I am connected via an NTL modem to the NTL network.

The important thing to note about using webmail is that the emails you read (the ones sent to you) remain in your mailbox on your hosting company's server. My 'archive' emails remain on the EasySpace mail server in my archive@abacusline.co.uk mailbox and are still there after I have read them. I can read them from any computer anywhere in the world. Furthermore, if I am using, for example, my son's computer, my email does not remain (in any easily accessible way) on his computer after I have read it.

Email client

I have Marcel as my email client on my RISC OS computer and Outlook Express on my Windows machines. My HP iPAQ h4150 PDA has something which behaves a bit like my Windows Outlook Express but seems to me to be much more robust and user friendly! My Samsung mobile 'phone has its own proprietary email client which allows me to send and receive emails (with attachments such as pictures) to anyone with an email address.

I have set up my grandson with his own email mailbox (one of the 10 or 20 I am allowed) which he operates completely independently of me (with his own password) on his father's computer (remember this is a Windows machine and it uses AoL broadband and the BT telephone network).

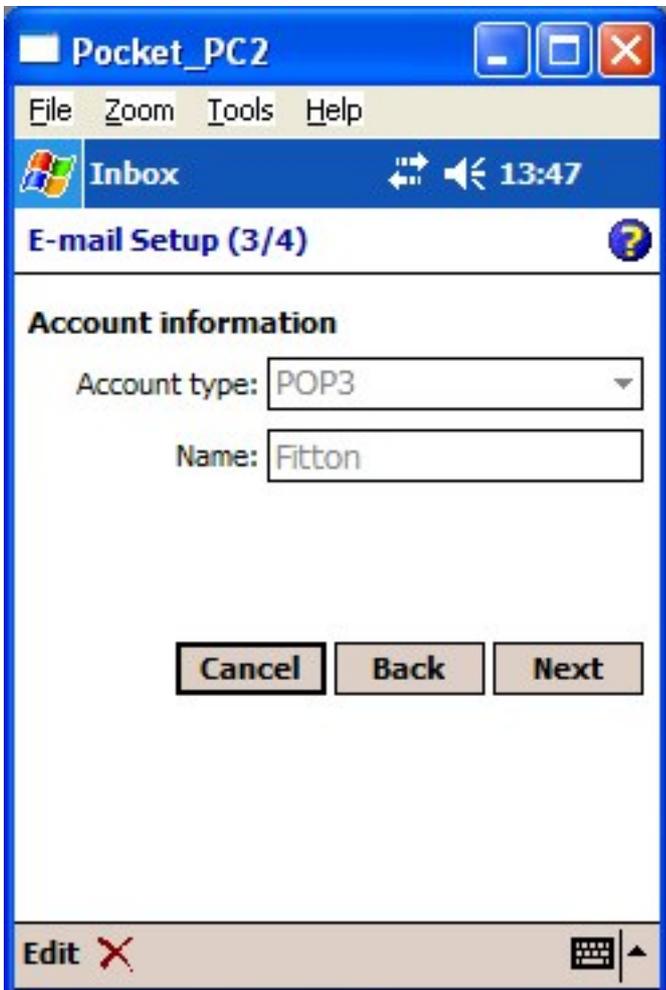
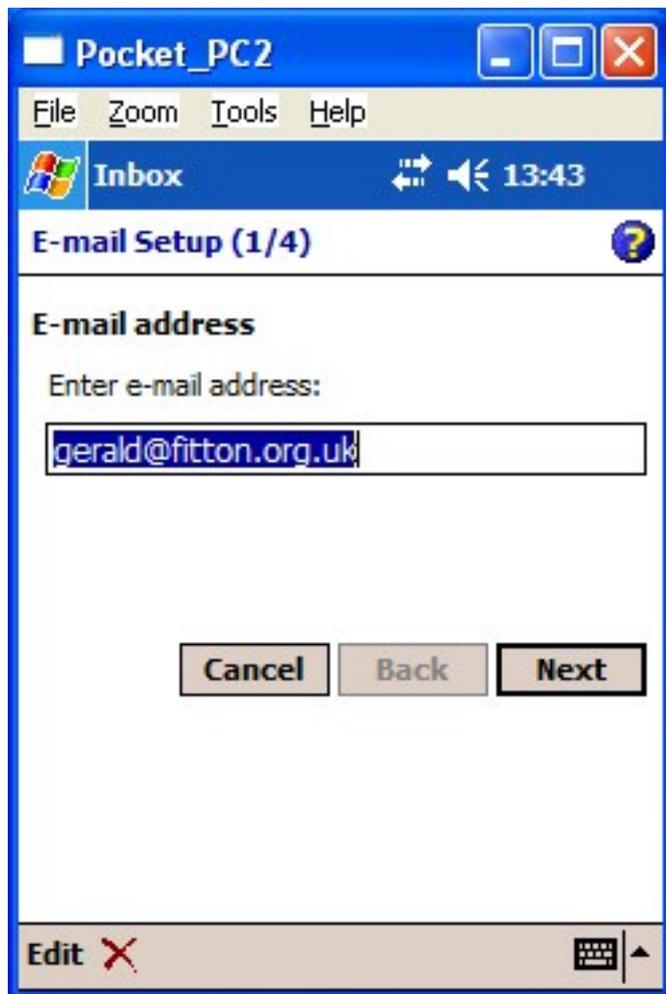
When I run one of my email clients then I download into memory and onto my hard drive (or the flash memory of my mobile 'phone) a copy of the emails which are in my EasySpace mailbox. I have the option of deleting the email from my EasySpace mailbox or leaving it there. Generally I configure my email clients so that the emails remain in the mailbox for 5 days (10 days when I go on holiday for a week) so that I can download the same email using each of my various email clients (on various pieces of hardware) and delete them from the EasySpace mailbox only when I have them finally on my 'main' machine.

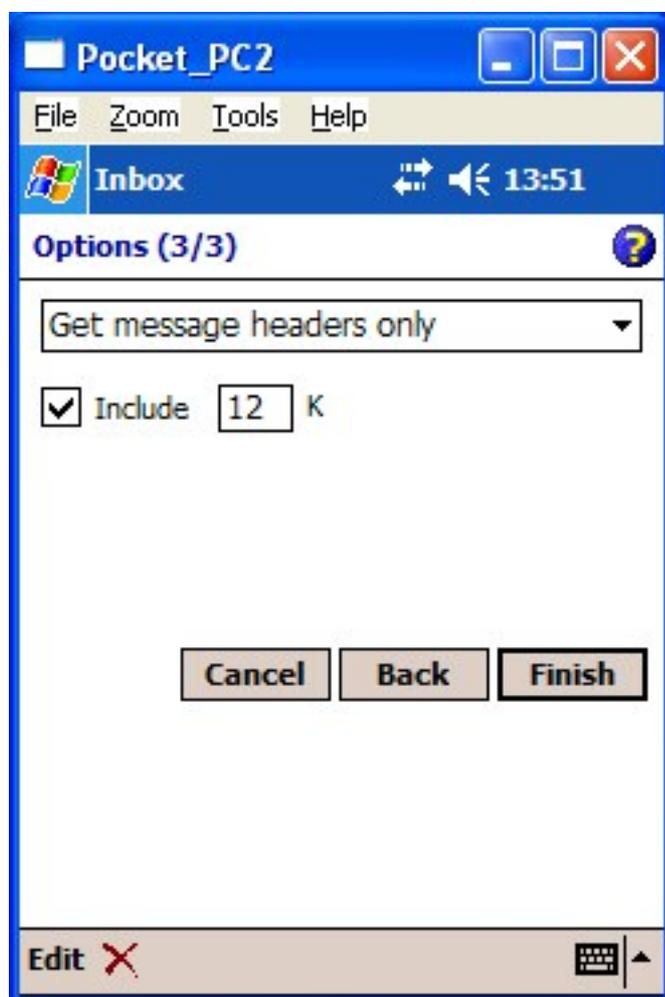
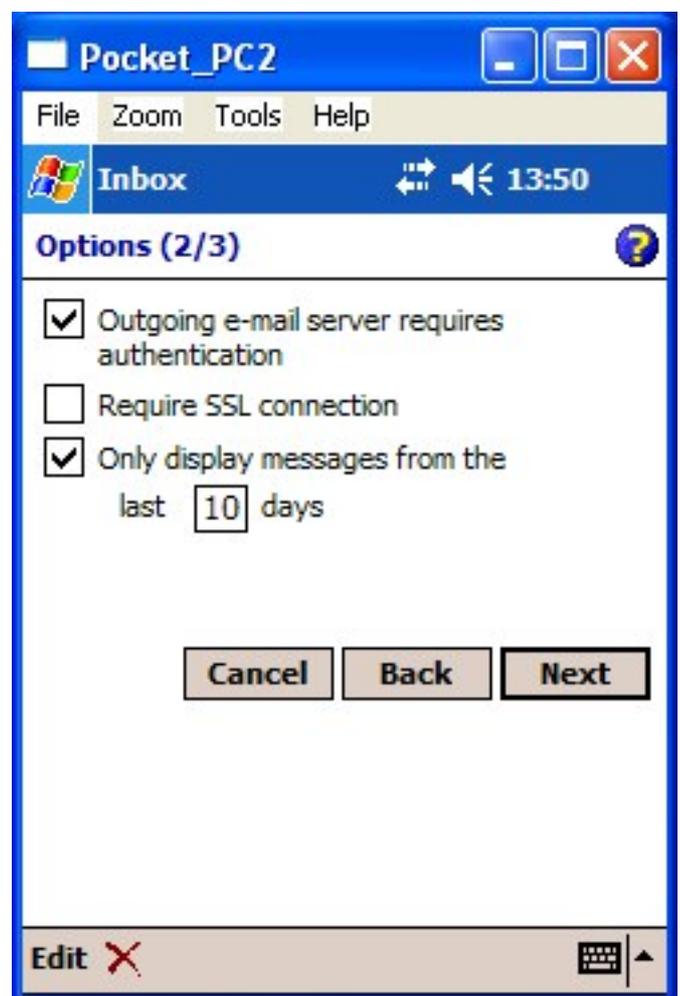
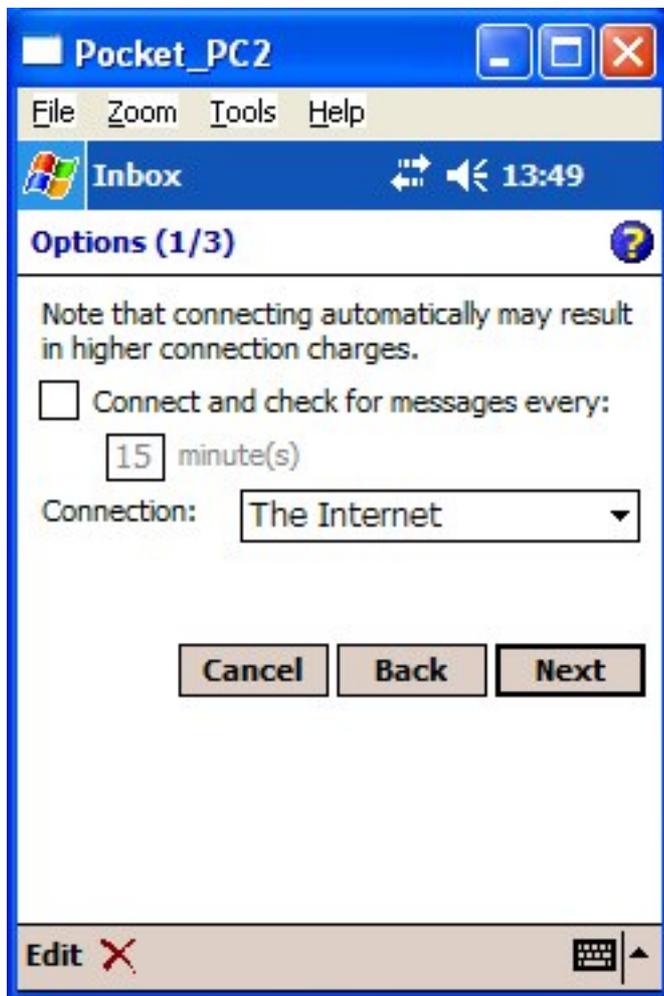
Setting up your email client

I thought about which of my many email clients I should use as my example.

I decided that I would use the one on my HP iPAQ h4150 PDA partly because it is something which is most of you will not have done (and thus might capture your attention), partly because each screen clearly demonstrates a particular stage of the process, partly because I like the screenshots but mainly because I have been asked very specifically how to set up a WiFi PDA as an email client and, in the process of helping my correspondent, I have already saved the eight screenshots showed on the next two pages!

In this series of screenshots work along the rows from left to right and then down the rows.





You should have written down (and received an email from your hosting company containing) all the 'difficult' information you need to fill in the boxes. These include your email account name and password as well as the names of the two (in & out) mail servers.

I have chosen my gerald@fitton.org.uk email address for this example. I must warn you again that if you try to send me an email to this address then my software will reject it unless you are on my special, exclusive 'white list' of relatives and close friends. Please use archive@abacusline.co.uk to correspond with me about Archive matters.

The first screenshot shows that I have entered the full email address, gerald@fitton.org.uk. A common mistake is to type in just the part before the "@" symbol, in my case "gerald".

Nearly all email clients will use this email address ("gerald@fitton.org.uk") as the User name; the Password is that which you chose when you filled in the boxes on the server (see last month's screenshot). The "Gerald Fitton" is the name which will appear in every email which you send. Usually you will see this in a line such as: "On the 17th December 2005 Gerald Fitton <gerald@fitton.org.uk> wrote:" when someone sends you a reply.

With EasySpace Gold you can only have POP (not IMAP) mailboxes. The Name "Fitton" is the name I have chosen for my email client account on my PDA.

I have three email accounts on my PDA; one of the others is called "O2" because it allows me to send and receive emails using my "gerald@o2.co.uk" email address (rarely used). I can select which of these three email accounts I use on my PDA; I select either "O2" or "Fitton" or the third (very secret) one. On my desktop machine I have a couple of dozen different accounts which I use for different purposes. I have given them different names so that I can choose the one I want by clicking on the Account Name (in this case "Fitton").

The screenshot "E-mail setup (4/4)" includes the names of the EasySpace mail servers used for Incoming and Outgoing mail. It is not usual for these to be the same. For example my NTL servers are "pop.ntlworld.com" and "smtp.ntlworld.com". Also, it is unusual for such expressions as "fitton.org.uk" (my domain name) to be part of the name of the mail server! When you set up your email account on your host's server you will be given these mail server addresses. The Domain "gerald" can usually be left blank. I put "gerald" in before I realised this.

There is an "Options" box showing in the screenshot "E-mail setup (4/4)" which leads to three more menus; these are shown in the next three screenshots. The first shows that the PDA can be set up to access the mailbox at regular intervals with a default of 15 minutes. The default for Outlook Express is 30 minutes. I have switched off this automatic download option because, when I am away from home, I often access the internet from my PDA via my Samsung mobile 'phone rather than through my WiFi broadband connection and I don't want it running up expensive bills whilst I'm not looking!

The second of the submenus, "Options (2/3)", has three tick boxes. At the moment most outgoing email servers do not require authentication but the trend is to require authentication. Ticking this box makes my PDA ready for when EasySpace change their policy.

You will see that I have chosen to automatically delete the copies of email messages which are on my PDA when they are 10 days old. This does not delete them from the mailbox on the EasySpace server; I delete them from the server using an automatic feature of my desktop email client. My grandson has set his parameters so that the only way of deleting emails from his server mailbox is manually. Every so often he goes through his old emails (the ones in his EasySpace mailbox) and deletes the ones he doesn't wish to keep.

The third submenu "Options (3/3)" gives me a choice about how much of each email I download into my PDA. You will see that this is set to 12 KB. At 12 KB I ensure that (nearly) all textual emails will be downloaded in their entirety whilst all attachments (such as pictures) will not be downloaded. Again, my reason for doing this is to avoid large mobile 'phone bills when I am away from home using my PDA (and 'phone) as my main means of sending and receiving emails.

The final screen should have been the first screen - but I have no regrets. I selected "Accounts" and then chose the "Fitton" account to gather the earlier screenshots.

You will see that I do store copies of my (usually truncated at 12 KB maximum) emails on my PDA flash memory storage card rather than in the more limited main memory. When I receive an email which has, let us say, a 100 KB picture attached then, after reading the text of the email, I can (if I want to) tap a menu selection and download the picture into my PDA memory card. I can display these pictures on the PDA screen.

Summary

Well, that's it. If you follow this process (it is slightly different for different hosting companies) then you will have set up your email client.

Your emails will be available to you either as webmail (in a later article I will describe how you can use a browser to do this) or through an email client.

Communication

For Archive correspondence, please write to me at <archive@abacusline.co.uk>. For Living with Technology, please use <lwt@abacusline.co.uk>. Finally, for technical assistance with PipeDream or Fireworkz, please write to <goldline@abacusline.co.uk>.

The website I use for Archive matters is at <http://archive.abacusline.co.uk>. This is a subdomain (there is no "www" in the URL) and it is password protected with the Username "archive" and the Password "amusement". So please be 'amused'.