

Gerald's Column

by Gerald Fitton

Last month I concentrated on handling email correspondence using what is called an email client such as Marcel or, on a Windows machine, Outlook or Outlook Express to download and read emails. This month I shall describe the use of what is called webmail.

Why WebMail?

Judging by the correspondence I have received, most of my readers use an email client and many have never used webmail. In contrast, many of my personal friends, use WebMail.

It will not come as a surprise to you to learn that these friends of mine who prefer webmail use Windows machines whereas the RISC OS readers with whom I have correspondence prefer to use an email client. So I ask myself (and you) the question "What is so great about WebMail?" and "How is it better than using an email client?"

Perversely, the answer is that, using WebMail you can deal with all your email correspondence without having to store anything on your computer!

Apart from the saving in space, why might you want to do that?

If you use more than one computer (perhaps you have a mixture of RISC OS, Windows, Linux and Apple machines - or even a PDA), if you use someone else's computer (your parents', your children's, your friends'), if you use a computer from many locations (at home, at work, on holiday, or from your second home!) or if you simply don't want to trust leaving important material on your own hard drive, then WebMail might be a better first choice than using an email client (see last month's article). If you are about to change machines or, even more relevant, if you are about to change operating systems such as from RISC OS to Linux or Windows then Webmail might make the changeover smoother.

I must emphasise that the benefits of using Webmail all arise from the fact that you don't have copies of your mail on your one and only, possibly vulnerable, hard drive. All your incoming and outgoing mail, contact addresses and maybe a calendar with appointments, etc, are all stored on your host's server. This server containing your emails (etc) can be accessed from anywhere in the world using any computer that is connected to the Internet.

Everything of yours (emails, addresses, calendar, etc) which you store on your host's server will be automatically backed up on a second (and possibly third) drive every day. The chances of both of their drives failing will generally be less than the chance of your one and only drive failing or becoming unusable for some other reason such as a virus.

Finally, on the topic of backup, you can use a protected area of your website to store 'important stuff' which you wouldn't want to lose if someone stole your machine.

Many of my friends who use Windows machines relate stories of how having important files in a password protected area of their personal website and keeping their emails on their host's server, has saved them lots of pain. If you haven't considered using Webmail then I suggest that you give it a go as an experiment; give yourself time to get over the initial shock of using something new, and see whether it does things for you!

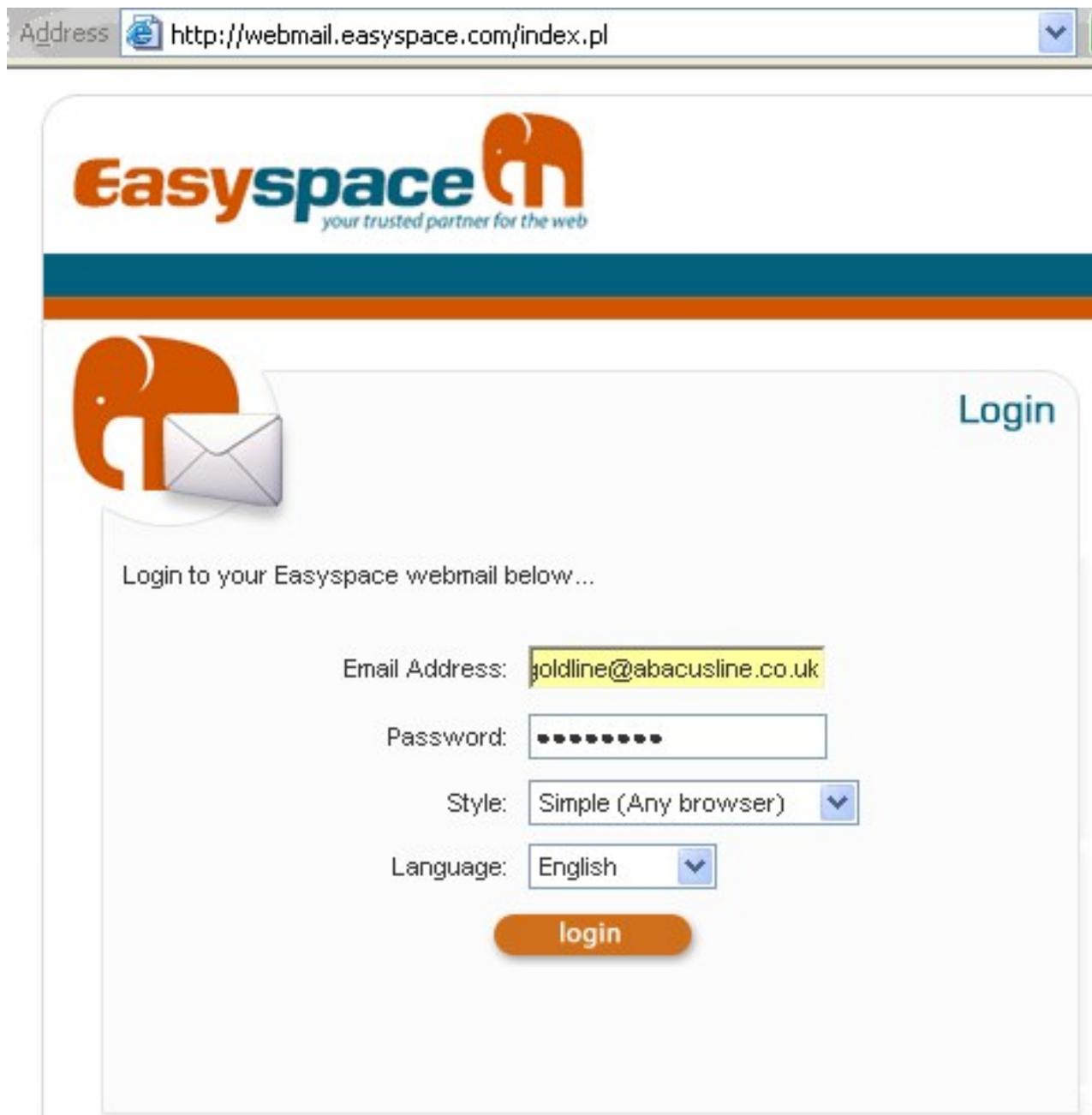
Go on! Experiment with WebMail.

What do you need?

A broadband connection rather than dial up is much to be preferred. It is the 'always on' feature of broadband which is more important than the speed. Alternatively, if you have one of the newer mobile 'phones then it is likely that you'll be able to connect any desktop computer, laptop or PDA via the 'phone to the Internet and be 'always on' without clocking up minute by minute charges. Most mobile 'phones charge Internet connections by the amount of traffic rather than the time spent on line. Usually the package they offer will be ample for all the email traffic for which you use your mobile 'phone.

Login

Have a look at the first screenshot.



Address  http://webmail.easyspace.com/index.pl

Easyspace 
your trusted partner for the web

Login

Login to your Easyspace webmail below...

Email Address:

Password:

Style: 

Language: 

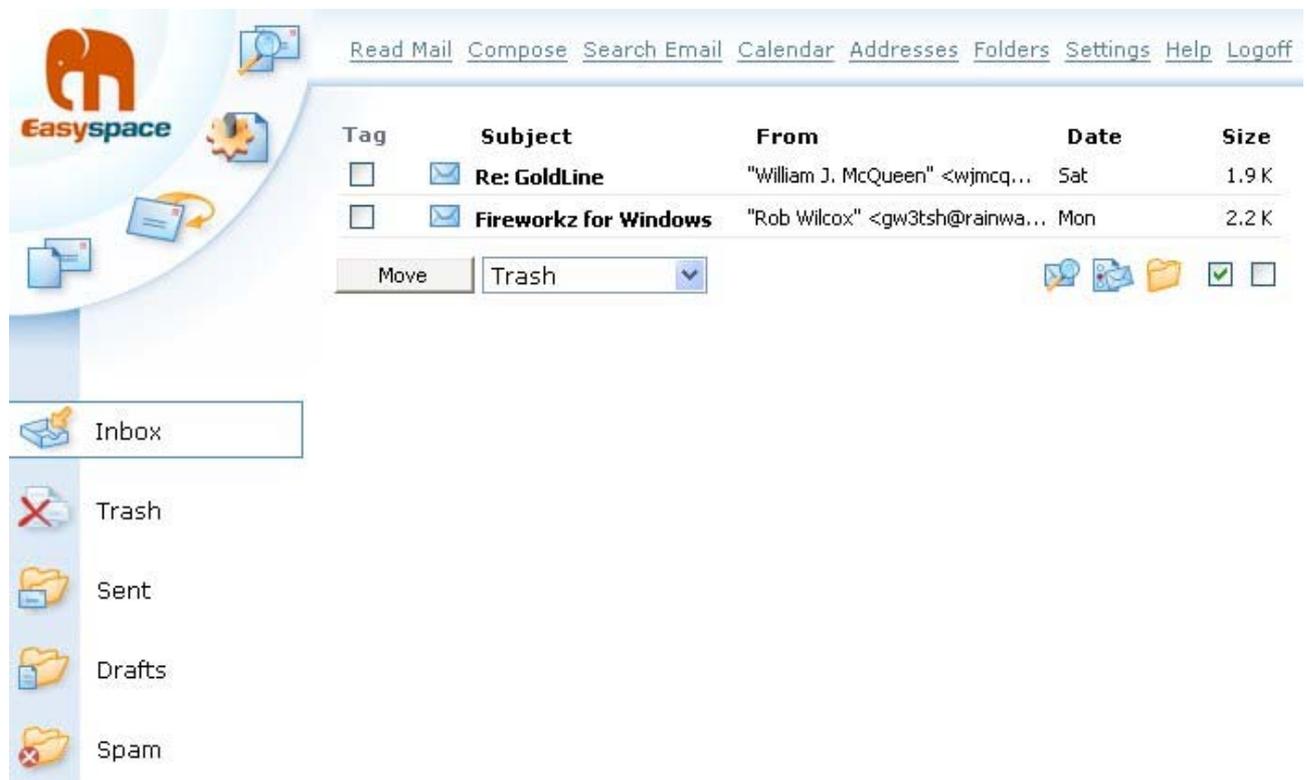
For my example I am using my goldline@abacusline.co.uk mailbox. I bought the abacusline.co.uk domain through EasySpace. The goldline@abacusline.co.uk mailbox is one of many; others are archive@abacusline.co.uk and lwt@abacusline.co.uk.

On any computer anywhere in the world I can go to the <http://webmail.easyspace.com>. This URL expands to <http://webmail.easyspace.com/index.pl> with the screen shown in the first screenshot.

You will see that I have logged in as goldline@abacusline.co.uk and entered my password. When I click on "login" the next screen appears.

Mailbox

Close to the elephant logo you will see an arc of icons running from a 3 o'clock to the 6 o'clock position. The screen which is shown by default is the one you will get if you click on the 5 o'clock icon (called "Check mail").



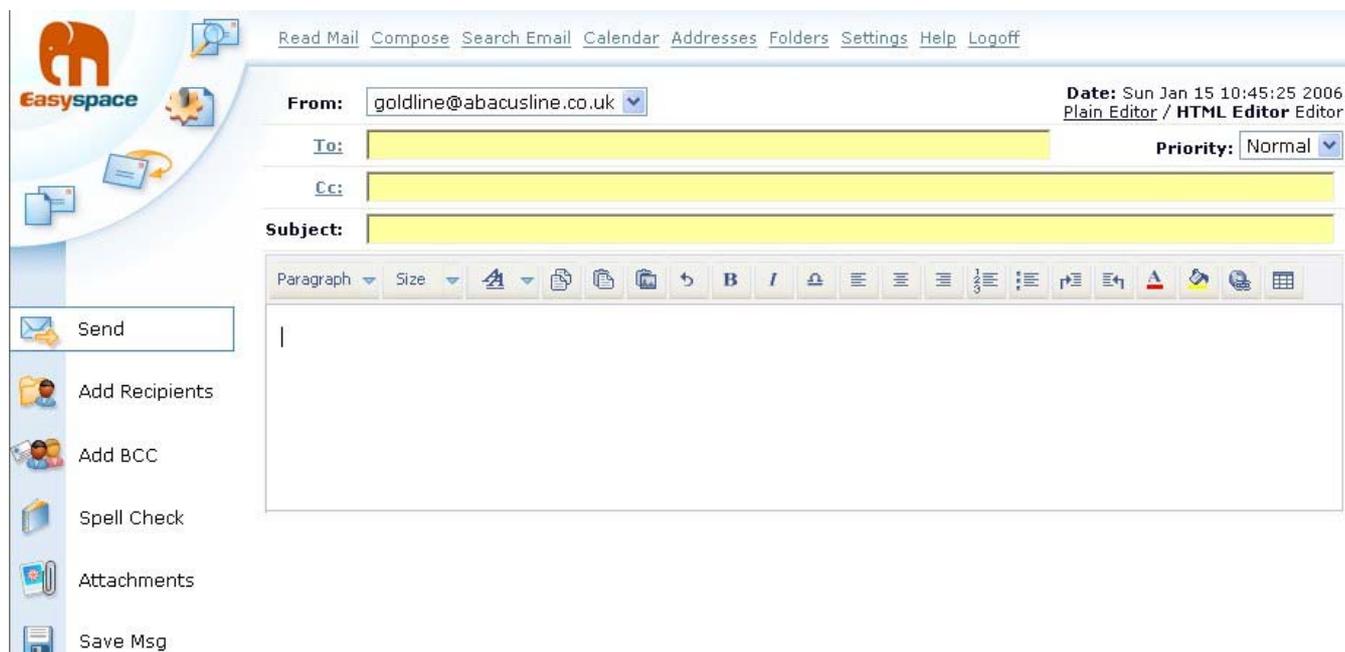
If you look across the menu items at the top of this screenshot you will find that you can store your Calendar of appointments and the email Addresses of your contacts. Clicking on a name in the Address book will return the full email addresses of your correspondent. Also you can enter a nickname and this will be expanded to the address.

You will see that I have a couple of emails in my Inbox, one from William J McQueen and a second one from Rob Wilcox. If I click on one of these then the email will open and I can read it. Having read it, then amongst other things such as looking at the headers or blocking him from sending me any more emails (!), I can compose a reply or forward his email to another email address.

To return to my Inbox I click on the icon at 5 o'clock.

Composing mail

Clicking on the icon at 6 o'clock brings up the third screenshot.

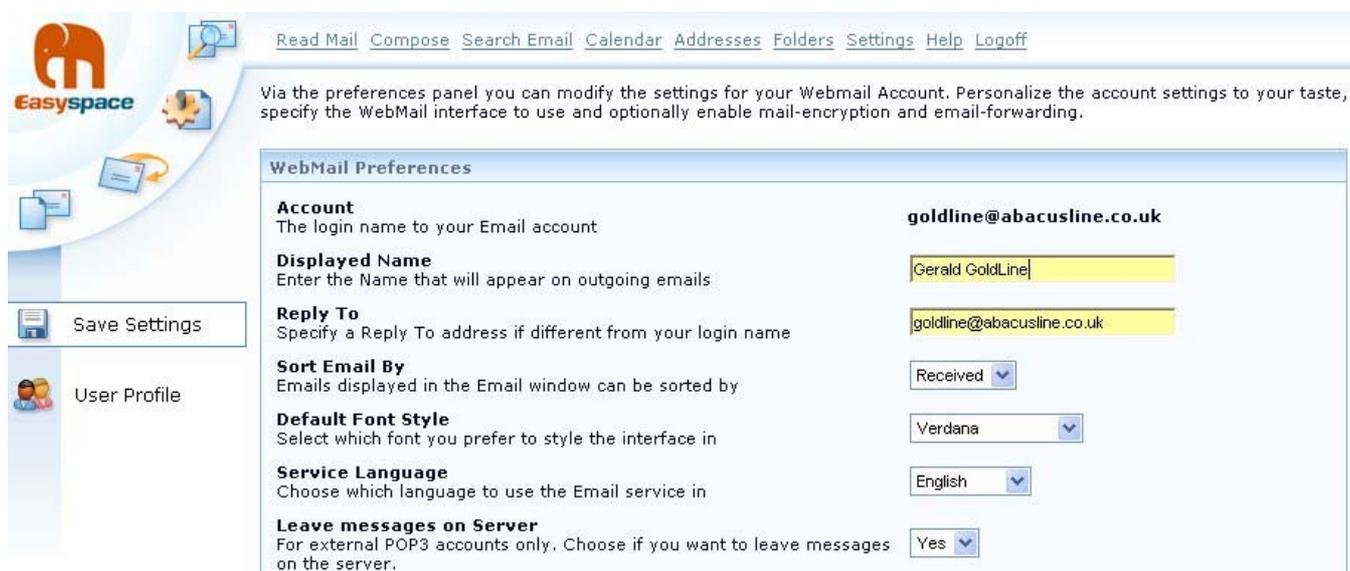


You will see that from this screen you can create an email and send it to anyone provided that you know their email address. The address doesn't need to be in your Address book but it does make the job easier if you don't have to type it in. You will see that you can do a Spell Check and add Attachments (which you will have to upload from your hard drive).

The email you send will be automatically saved in a folder called "Sent" and it will remain there until you decide to get rid of it or until your mailbox becomes full.

Settings

If you click on the icon at 4 o'clock you will see the fourth screenshot. "Settings" has a lot more on it than I show in my screenshot but the important bits are at the top.



The "Displayed Name" will appear in emails you send in such a way that if your correspondent replies to you it will show something like:

"Gerald Goldline <gerald@abacusline.co.uk>"

You can choose to have people "Reply to" an email address which is different from your login email address.

Other features

All the Webmail programs I have seen offer an address book and calendar as well as the facility to search your emails for key words or phrases and do a spell check. Many will automatically check your incoming emails for a virus or for spam without extra charge; some do make a small charge for adding this facility.

Summary

If you are on broadband and have never tried WebMail then you don't know what you are missing! Certainly if you have many internet connected computers, if you use computers from many locations and particularly if, regularly, you use a computer belonging to someone else (for example at a library, internet cafe or at work) to do your correspondence then WebMail rather than an email client has distinct benefits.

Fireworkz for Windows

By the time you read this we shall have released on CD a 32 bit version of Fireworkz for Windows, V 1.33. Unlike earlier versions, V 1.33 supports long filenames.

Fireworkz for Windows runs only on Windows machines. It does not run under RISC OS.

Please go to <http://www.abacusline.co.uk> for further details.

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'.