



# **OPEN-XCHANGE**

## **What is Fetchmail?**

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Published 16th January

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# What is fetchmail and how is it used?

## 1. What fetchmail is

Fetchmail is software that fetches emails from an external email accounts (e.g. from Google's Gmail, Microsoft's Hotmail, GMX etc.) and then deliver them to the mailboxes of a local mail server. That way it is possible to have email mailboxes maintained by a large provider and still have them available in Open-Xchange Express Edition. Fetchmail, in Open-Xchange Express Edition, supports both POP and IMAP mailboxes in singledrop and multidrop mode. With singledrop, emails are fetched from an external mailbox and delivered to a single internal mailbox while with multidrop, emails from an external mailbox are delivered to several internal mailboxes. Singledrop is said to be a more simple and robust procedure. Note that if not correctly configured multidrop can cause the loss of emails.

## 2. When to use fetchmail

There are various good reason to use fetchmail.

- **Availability.** Emails can only be delivered reliably when the receiving mail server is available 24/7. This is not the case when the email server is using a dynamic IP address and the IP provider forces a change, for example, every day. This is also not the case when the Internet provider has an outage or the server is down due to a software or hardware problem. Also software updates can cause small downtimes which might lead to the loss of emails. A mailbox provider usually takes care of all these issues therefore decreasing potential downtimes and thus increasing availability. If high availability cannot be guaranteed fetchmail should be the preferred method.
- **Domain name.** To deliver emails to a mail server the server must have a domain name. In case a server does not have a domain name fetchmail is the only way to “receive” emails from outside the local network.
- **Backup.** Business emails should be treated carefully. This means regular backups should be made to make sure no important emails are lost if the server crashes (e.g. Software or hardware problems). Assuming that the mailbox provider takes care of regular backups then a copy of all emails should be left on the server. If the local server then crashes it is then sufficient to reinstall the software and then re-fetch all the messages. Therefore, if regular backups cannot be guaranteed, fetchmail should be the preferred solution and a copy of all emails should be left on the server.

On the other hand fetchmail has some drawbacks that should also be mentioned:

- **Complexity.** Choosing fetchmail means that there are three players in the game: The sender of an email; the provider who receives and stores the email and the local server that fetches the email from the provider. In contrast, if emails are sent directly to the local server the complexity of the system is significantly reduced. With reduces complexity comes a reduction in number of points of failure (Note: The provider could go offline too). Furthermore, each user on the provider has to be configured as well as each user on the fetchmail system.
- **Costs.** The mailbox provider implies additional costs for the mailbox service which includes hosting and other technical features such as a guaranteed high availability and crash recovery mechanism.

### 3. What fetchmail can do

- Fetchmail can fetch emails from external email accounts.
- Fetchmail can retrieve emails using POP, IMAP and the secure variants: POPS and IMAPS.
- Fetchmail can deliver emails from one external email account to one local mailbox (singledrop). One external mailbox “belongs to” one local user.
- Fetchmail can deliver emails from one external email account to many local mailboxes (multidrop). To use this feature the external mailbox has to accept emails for different users (different email addresses). The same addresses have to be set up on the local server. All emails will then be collected from one external mailbox and distributed to different local mailboxes. Multidrop requires configuration on both the mailbox provider's side as well as in the fetchmail side.
- Fetchmail can either delete emails when they have been delivered to a local mailbox successfully or leave all messages in the external mailbox.
- Fetchmail can send undeliverable emails to the administrator.