

# Mail on the move

As demand grows for mobile e-mail access, Messageware offers two products to help keep users in the know and administrators sane

BY KAY EWBank, CONSULTANT EDITOR, ESM

For those who want to read their e-mails when they're away from their desk, Outlook Web Access (OWA) is a popular choice. It was first introduced as an optional component in Exchange 5.0, and allows users to get at their e-mails via a web browser.

The most common use of OWA is when users are working away from the office: either at home, when travelling, or in other companies' offices. Some organisations have actually standardised on OWA. This is because the web interface removes the need to reconfigure client profiles as users move from machine to machine – a useful feature for campus sites or 'hot desking'.

Although OWA is popular, it does have some drawbacks. The first is that the functionality of the client is limited compared with full-blown Outlook. There's no spell checker, for example, and you lose the Outlook contact list style of addressing.

More worrying, OWA has some notable security loopholes. For example, user logon credentials are often cached by the browser. This means that the person who uses the web browser after you could get access to your OWA account. This, of course, compromises the security of both personal and corporate information.

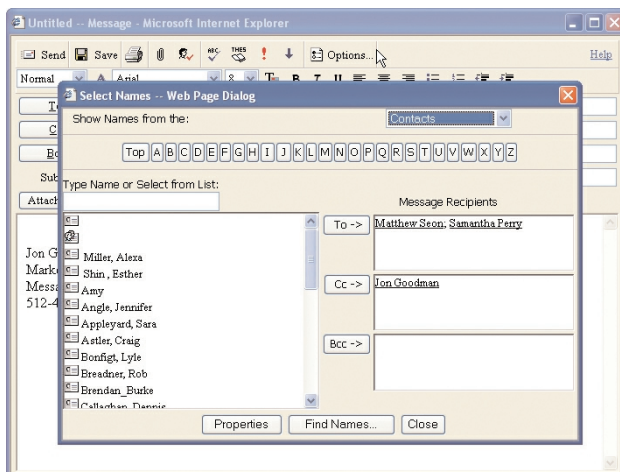


Figure 1: Users can select names from the GAL, their personal contacts, or public folders using a graphical, Outlook-style interface

A solution on offer from Essential Computing is Messageware's SecureLogoff and Plus Pack for OWA. The two address different problems. SecureLogoff enhances the security of OWA, and Plus Pack adds in some of the 'missing' features of the web client. There are versions for both Exchange 5.5 and Exchange 2000.

### Checking your credentials

If you use OWA 'as is', there's a risk your logon credentials will be held in cache. Simply by picking up the session URL from the history list, you, or someone else, could re-enter the account without the need to re-authenticate. With SecureLogoff installed, once you've logged off you are prompted to re-enter your authentication details before you can re-access your account.

Another security issue with OWA is that your session will not time out if you forget to logout and close the browser window. With SecureLogoff you can set a time-out period. So if the session has been inactive for, say, five minutes, you would need to restart your browser and then re-authenticate.

If you use a browser other than Internet Explorer, such as Netscape, you will have to authenticate and then verify your ID and password. Administrators can optionally capture attempts to log on to the event log, adding a further level of security to your armoury.

### Plus points

Plus Pack for OWA takes the standard OWA user interface and adds a range of user and administrative features:

**Spell checking** Once Plus Pack is installed, users can spell check their e-mails, either on request when composing the message or automatically at the point of sending. With Plus Pack 5.5 the dictionary can reside on the server. Plus Pack 2000 provides the option of using either the Microsoft Word dictionary on the resident machine (if available) or downloading the Plus Pack dictionary. This could be a problem if you are using OWA from an Internet Café, but the next release of Plus Pack 2000 promises to give the option of server-side spell checking. The Plus

# PRODUCT REVIEW: SECURE LOGOFF AND PLUS PACK

Pack dictionary is faster than using Word's dictionary, but lacks Word's multi-language recognition.

**Improved addressing** Addressing e-mails using OWA alone is frustrating. There's no list of names to 'point and click' at because of the loss of the Exchange Global Address List (GAL). Plus Pack offers a graphical list of recipients (**Figure 1**), by default from the GAL, or if you as the administrator choose, from their personal and public folders.

It's also possible to enable or disable Personal Distribution Lists. If enabled, the user will be able to create, edit, and delete Outlook compatible personal distribution lists, choosing the members from the GAL and from their personal contact lists and public folders. More importantly, they will also be able to use the distribution lists for addressing e-mails to groups of addresses. If you're using Exchange 2000 with Service Pack 2, your users will already be able to choose addresses from the GAL, but not from their personal contacts and folders. And if you're using Exchange 2000 with Service Pack 2, you can't prevent the use of Personal Distribution Lists.

**Signatures** Other improvements to the default working of OWA include the ability to create a personal signature in HTML and have it saved as part of the user profile so that it's automatically added when a new message is composed.

## Plus the latest...

As well as the features described above (all of which are found in both Plus Pack 5.5 and Plus Pack 2000), Plus Pack 2000 includes a range of new features:

**Attachment compression and blocking** As an administrator, you can use Plus Pack to block attachments from being uploaded to the Exchange server – OWA HTTP sessions bypass the anti-virus e-mail scanners that are used to check inbound and outbound SMTP mail.

Plus Pack allows you to define which file types you want to block from entering the Exchange environment via the OWA client, such as all .EXE files, so reducing the risk of OWA users infecting the Exchange environment with a virus. Plus Pack can also be used to compress attachments on messages, calendar items or contacts.

Attachments are compressed as zip files, which can be decompressed when received by a client at a Windows XP machine or by a user with a WinZip-compatible program. When you compress an attachment, you follow the same steps as you would

if you were attaching it under 'normal' OWA, except that there's a choice to be made between 'Attach' and 'Compress & Attach'.

Compression reduces upload times – a Word document will be compressed by up to 85 per cent, and spreadsheets and presentations by up to 75 per cent. This obviously reduces the time required to send the file, and it also avoids some problems where there's a limit on the maximum message size.

**Automatic refresh** and notification Another Outlook feature that users lack in OWA is automatic in-box refresh and new mail notification. Plus Pack 2000 provides these options in OWA; it automatically refreshes users' in-boxes, and it notifies them when they have new mail. Users can choose the time interval for checking for new mail automatically, with options of between 1 and 15 minutes, or a default setting of 'never'. They can also choose whether to be notified when new mail appears.

**'Look and feel'** Plus Pack also has a feature called Folder Properties. When activated, Folder Properties allow users to view summary information such as the number of read and unread messages in a folder and provides the ability to add additional Contact Folders to the Outlook-style Addressing feature.

If you're using a version of Exchange prior to 2000 SP2, you can also let your users select whether the Outlook bar view shows shortcuts or folders. Those using SP2 already get this choice as OWA defaults to the view last chosen by the user.

**And finally...** For those stuck for the right word, Plus Pack 2000 also gives users a thesaurus – a feature that's not even available in Outlook!

## Conclusion

As users increasingly work away from a fixed location, they become more reliant on OWA. Although OWA's basic interface is reasonable, it lacks functionality and ease of use. The combination of SecureLogoff and Plus Pack can't convert OWA into full-blown Outlook, but it overcomes OWA's worst irritations and shortcomings.

From an administrative viewpoint, SecureLogoff takes away the headache of wondering whether your users are unwittingly compromising the security of your corporate information, while Plus Pack helps avoid the introduction of viruses through OWA. As a user, features such as your own signature, contact list, and knowing your e-mails are correctly spelt saves time and makes OWA a lot more friendly. <

## System requirements

### Plus Pack 5.5 for OWA

Server: Exchange 5.5 SP 3.  
Client: None.

### Plus Pack 2000 for OWA

Server: Exchange 2000 Server.  
Client: Windows platform and Internet Explorer 5.x or higher; no client requirements in next release.

### SecureLogoff for OWA 5.5

Exchange 5.5 SP 3 and session-based cookies.

### SecureLogoff for OWA 2000

Exchange 2000 Server SP 2 and session-based cookies.

## UK supplier

Essential Computing  
Tel: 01275 343199  
E-mail: [info@essential.co.uk](mailto:info@essential.co.uk)  
[www.essential.co.uk/owa](http://www.essential.co.uk/owa)

## Cost

Starts at £420 for a 25-user licence for either Plus Pack or SecureLogoff. Exchange Server CPU and enterprise licensing is available.

## Bottom line

**Pros** Makes web-based Outlook use more secure and extra features improve user productivity. Supports both Exchange 5.5 and 2000.

**Cons** If you're using a browser other than Internet Explorer, users will have to authenticate twice. Plus Pack's dictionary lacks Word's multi-language spell checking.