

Is Hotmail Hotter Now That It's Outlook.com?

by [Katherine Boehret](#)

Microsoft is giving its 16-year-old Web-email service a total overhaul and a new name. And the results are impressive.

It is now called Outlook.com. This is part of a new Microsoft strategy to use "Outlook" as the name for all its email offerings.

I've been using a pre-release version of this new email service for the past seven days and it includes dozens of smart features that simplify the otherwise-exasperating process of managing your email inbox. Examples include optional one-click scheduled cleanups of mail that delete all but the last message you got from someone; a safe, built-in way to unsubscribe from newsletters; and easy methods for creating email sorting rules for new and old messages. I cut the number of emails in my inbox in half after the first day of using Outlook.com.

The new Web-email service also incorporates social networks like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, displaying profile photos and status updates alongside email messages. And yes, you'll have the option of getting a new, @Outlook.com address, though you can also opt to stick with your @hotmail.com address. Though Hotmail is still the leading Web email service world-wide with over 325 million users, according to comScore Inc., Yahoo and Google's Gmail dominate in the U.S.

The address book in Microsoft's new Outlook.com shows people's photos with their names.

This is just one of many dramatic moves at Microsoft this summer. The company is readying for the massive fall launch of Windows 8, which will historically meld the desktop PC and tablet operating systems in one place. It also just announced a new version of Office 2013, which updates the software program to work smarter with the Web. If that wasn't enough, in June the company announced its upcoming iPad challenger, Surface, which favors Apple's model of designing and manufacturing hardware in lieu of Microsoft's traditional software-only philosophy.

Not all of the features in Outlook.com will work as you expect. Only half of my email contacts' names appeared with profile photos automatically pulled in from Facebook. This was because those friends either weren't on Facebook or had registered for Facebook with an email other than the one they were using to communicate with me. I only saw a couple friends' Twitter updates. Facebook chat is also built in, but I rarely use this.

When Outlook.com's automatic linking to social networks did work, the result was magical. Dull, text-only contact names were suddenly enhanced by photos, some from people I didn't know were on Facebook.

I didn't have to leave email to see my friends' latest status updates. I could click a thumbs-up icon to "like" the status right in Outlook.com, or click a word bubble to comment, though this sent me off to Facebook.com. If someone was registered on Facebook but we weren't friends, I saw that person's profile photo and a link to add the person as a friend. I did this with one of my longtime tennis teammates.

The overall look of Outlook.com is much cleaner and more refined compared to Hotmail. Fonts are larger and easier to read, and it has built-in, playful animations that made me want to send emails: Each time I hit Send, the whole message appeared to instantly shrink and be sent off away from me.

Rather than cramming Mail, People, Calendar and SkyDrive (Microsoft's cloud storage service) into one screen, Outlook.com lets you toggle between these categories using four large tiles. And these tiles only appear when you tap a drop-down arrow, so they don't take up space on your screen.

The old Hotmail did a nice job handling photos. Outlook.com takes that a step further by seamlessly integrating SkyDrive. When I attached photos to emails, a message appeared in the composing screen prompting me to, instead, share the photos via SkyDrive, which sends thumbnail images in emails and links friends to the Web to see actual images, rather than clogging my friends' inboxes with big attachments.

Also in this email-composing screen, I could name the new SkyDrive folder that would hold my photos. People who received these emails were delighted, like my sister, who said it was easy to scroll through images—and she loved that there wasn't a complicated sign-in.

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But what if you use another Web mail service and all of your friends already know that address and email you there? Outlook.com is only too happy to import your contacts from other services, and it offers a way to receive email from other accounts. You can also send mail from Outlook.com on behalf of your other accounts, like Gmail. Outlook.com is technically in a “preview” stage, but Microsoft said it will remove the “on behalf of” later this year and just send emails as if they were from your other account.

Outlook.com doesn't have a smart way of automatically sorting important emails, like Google's Gmail Priority Inbox, which is my favorite feature in Gmail. Microsoft's new Outlook.com looks elegant and has a remarkably user-friendly interface. If you're overwhelmed by a cluttered inbox, want a better way to sort emails or need an easier way to share photos and files, Outlook.com is a winner.

Outlook.com is free modern **email** service from **Microsoft**. Get a clean clutter free inbox, easily connect with **Office** Web Apps and SkyDrive and use it with your Hotmail, live, or outlook account

Begin by going to <https://office.live.com/start/default.aspx> Sign in or manage my account (to create a Microsoft email account.)

Then sign in and begin using Outlook for emails and or office program for free. All document will be connected to your skydive account on your PC, Tablet, or both.