

Can I keep my old email address ?

Many people have email addresses tied to their internet service provider (ISP), for example AOL or Freeserve (now Orange). If these addresses are used widely, or included in advertising / stationery / signs, it can be expensive and inconvenient to change them.

Ideally any person or organisation in this situation should have email facilities that are independent of their internet service provider as they may wish to change providers to get a better deal or a faster service. Tying oneself to one provider is a barrier to competitive purchasing of services.

In many cases it is possible to maintain an old email address while changing service provider. Most email accounts can be accessed from anywhere on the Internet, so the actual collection of mail is not usually a problem. You can have Orange broadband and collect AOL email, for example.

The *sending* of email usually requires that you use your current ISP's server to reduce spam and other problems with anonymous senders of email. The email can still have your "old" address as the "From" and "Reply to" addresses, but will simply be handled by the "new" ISP's server.

So the answer to the question "can I keep my old email address" tends to be specific to the policies of your current provider :-

Freeserve/Wanadoo/Orange have pay as you go (PAYG) dialup accounts that require you to dial in once a month or once every 3 months to keep them alive. They also provide a web page to reactivate the account if it "times out". I have used a Freeserve email account for several years without using their paid for services other than the occasional PAYG dialup call.

AOL provide free email addresses to anyone via their web page, if you leave a subscription service with AOL you can transfer or re-activate your old address on the new free service and access it via the web. You won't be able to use AOL's software to collect the mail, which may be a blessing.

BT also provide free "basic mail" to anyone these days. This allows access to email via a web browser and they also have a "Premium" account for £1.50 per month or so that gives full access using Thunderbird/Outlook/Outlook Express and similar mail software.

In each case you should check the current terms and conditions on the website, perhaps starting from the perspective of someone wanting email only. When you come to leave your ISP ask to be downgraded to a PAYG dialup user rather than just deleted from the system, say you want to dial up when travelling. That way your account should stay live but the cost will be saved.

Longer term, talk to your computing expert about registering a domain name and having your own email address you@yourown.co.uk so that this problem doesn't come back to haunt you in the future.

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