

Email Attachments

winmail.dat attachments

Have you received email messages with a strange file attached, called winmail.dat? When you attempt to open this file, either it can't be opened at all, or it contains "garbage" data.

The most commonly used email client programs seems to be Microsoft Outlook. Unfortunately, Outlook does not "play nice" with the other email programs all the time. This causes problems, not for the sender of the email, but the recipient, particularly when actual files are attached to messages.

Outlook is a rather powerful email client program with a number of features that look very attractive. Most notably, Outlook allows users to send email in a variety of formats; It's these formatting options that cause the problems.

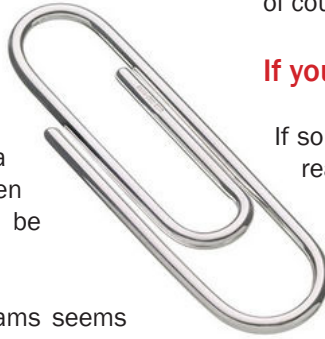
- as plain vanilla text with no formatting
- in Rich Text Format, which allows for a limited amount of formatting, such as boldface/italic/underlined text or different fonts
- formatted with the HTML formatting language so that it appears (sort of) like a web page
- formatted as a Microsoft Word document

When an Outlook user composes and sends a message using either Rich Text Format or HTML Format, Outlook automatically generates a file, winmail.dat, and attaches it to the end of the message. winmail.dat contains formatting information, in a human-unreadable form, that Outlook will use on the receiving end to display this email message correctly. Unfortunately, Outlook is the ONLY email client program that can use this information! Other email client programs don't understand this information.

If you are receiving these winmail.dat files

We assume at this point that you are not using Microsoft Outlook as your email client program, since this wouldn't be a problem if you were using it.

There's not much you can do on your end to fix the problem, since it's not your email program generating the problem. If you just don't want to deal with the problem, the other approach is to reply to the individual who sent you the offending email and ask that they re-send the message, with the attached files, as a plain text message, not in Rich Text Format or HTML. If they don't know how to do this, you can,



of course, refer them to this document!

If you are sending these winmail.dat files

If someone emails you to complain that they couldn't read your attachments, or to ask what this "winmail.dat" file is that you sent them, chances are you sent this email using Microsoft Outlook 97/2000/2003/2007 (or, very remotely possibly, another product using Microsoft Exchange Server). Although you are not the one having the problem, you are the one who gets to fix the problem.

You have multiple possible ways to fix the problem, depending on how you have set up your address book capabilities and whether or not you are using a mailing list or group mailing to send out the offending email. Please read the remainder of this section before you begin making changes to your settings, as there are two special situations, discussed first, that you must consider before choosing the appropriate solution.

Special Situations

If you are sending messages to a mailing list or as a group mailing

In this situation, you MUST set ALL users up so that they receive plain text email. If even one user is set up in your address book, or your default setting is to receive Rich Text Format or HTML format email, everyone will receive that format. You must either edit every address book entry for every individual on your mailing list, or change your default sending mode to plain text. Both methods are described below.

If you use an online directory (LDAP server) to look up the recipient's address

In this situation, you have no address book entry to edit, so you may either change your default sending mode to plain text or change the sending mode manually for each message.

Solution details

If the recipient is in your address book

1. Open up your Outlook Address Book, either by clicking on the Address Book icon or by choosing Tools->Address Book

2. Select the recipient's entry in your address book and open up their Properties, either by clicking on the Properties button or double-clicking on the recipient's entry.
3. Select the "Name" tab in the Properties dialog window.
4. Check the box at the bottom of the window that says "Send email using plain text only".
5. Click the "OK" button.

If you enter the recipient's address manually in the To: line of your email message

EACH TIME you send a message to this person, you must:

1. Create a new email message as you normally would, but before sending it,
2. Choose Format->Plain Text from the menu bar.
3. Now send your message.

If you want to change your default sending mode

You may change your default sending mode in Outlook, thereby sending all email messages as plain text, by doing the following:

1. Select Tools-> Options from the Outlook menu bar.
2. Select the "Mail Format" tab in the dialog window.
3. In the first drop-down list, under the "Message Format" heading, select Plain Text
4. Click the "OK" button.

Email Attachment Etiquette

Email is a fantastic tool for sending all kinds of documents instantly all over the world. However, there are various potential problems you need to be aware of when sending attachments.

People are generally more and more wary of opening attachments, especially from strangers, since they often conceal viruses, trojan horses, spyware and other "nasty" software. Even if the recipient is willing, your email may never get to them, as many corporate email systems will automatically filter emails with attachments as "spam", especially from sources outside of the company. There may also be limits to the size of email their email software can cope with, Lobo Internet does NOT limit the size but your intended recipient most likely does.



The best way to send email with attachments

Follow these simple steps to maximise the chances of your email getting through, and getting noticed.

- Confirm with the recipient whether it's ok to send them an attachment, and what kind of file format they'd prefer. Are they able to accept ZIP files, for example? (these can greatly reduce the size of a document, but they're useless if the recipient doesn't have the tools to open them)
- Send the email with the attachment in the agreed format. If you have more than one attachment to send, then send multiple emails, with a single attachment per email. That will increase the chance that each email will make it through the corporate email filters.
- Send a simple follow-up email immediately, explaining that you've just sent an email (or x number of emails) with an attachment. That way, your follow-up email should make it through even if the email with the attachment was automatically filtered as spam.

How big an email attachment is too big?

Different email systems have different limits on the size of a single email. Emails above the limit may be silently rejected (i.e. you won't get any kind of warning, but they'll be discarded automatically before they ever get to the recipient) or may be "bounced" back to you with a warning such as "Message too large".

It's worth remembering that the sending process itself adds "overhead" to the size of the file, often as much as 30 to 40% of its original size. So for instance if the receiving email system is only able to cope with emails that are 10MB or less in size, then for practical purposes you should limit yourself to sending files that are no bigger than 6MB.

If your intended recipient is able to cope with ZIP files, that can be one way of cutting down on the size of attachments. Some file formats, such as PDF, text or Microsoft Word documents, will compress extremely well, and you're able to achieve substantial savings in file size. Other file formats, particularly for graphics and video, will hardly compress at all.

It's even more important to exercise restraint if your email is intended to go out to many people. For example, if you're emailing 100 people, then by sending an attachment you're forcing the email system to cope with 100 very large emails at the same time, potentially putting you and the server on a spam list as well!