

Crabby's guide to Outlook profiles versus e-mail accounts

Applies to: Microsoft Outlook 2010, Outlook 2007, Outlook 2003, Outlook 2002

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Crabby Office Lady

These days, I find it very difficult to keep track of my kids, let alone my various e-mail accounts with their separate calendars and contact lists. Maybe you're confused about how to share Outlook with more than one user, more than one e-mail address, or both. So let's talk about profiles, accounts, and the difference between them.

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If you have one computer that you use for work, and one you use for personal use, you probably have two or more (or a LOT more) e-mail accounts. You may even use one computer for both your work and personal use. Either way, it's important to keep things separate.

What a lovely profile you have

When you first set up Outlook, a new "profile" was automatically set up for you. An Outlook profile is what Outlook uses to remember the e-mail accounts and the settings that tell Outlook where your e-mail is stored. While this can include *information* about multiple e-mail accounts, that's not what a profile is; it's not an e-mail account. See, you can have several e-mail accounts on one profile. That is, as long as you aren't using more than one Exchange Server account on one profile, which you won't be because Outlook won't let you. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

To show you what I'm talking about, I offer you this scenario:

- You have an e-mail account at work that you'd like to access from your home computer.
- You also have two personal e-mail accounts that you want to access from the same computer.
- And, just to add to the fun, you have a better half who also has a work e-mail account and one or two personal accounts that she'd like to access from the same computer.

How do you keep it all straight, safe, and secure? In a word: Profiles.

So... what's in a profile?

Your profile tells Outlook two basic things: 1) what e-mail account information to use, and 2) where data is delivered and stored. You probably want your work e-mail kept in a separate place from your personal e-mail, and also separate from your wife's work e-mail and personal e-mail. Sound complicated? Not at all; your Outlook profile lives for this kind of challenge.

To set up proper profiling for our scenario above, you will need to create four profiles: one for your work, one for your personal accounts (you can have one profile for all of the personal accounts; I'll get to that in a minute), one for your wife's work, and one for your wife's personal accounts. If you do set up a profile to manage multiple e-mail accounts, you can choose which accounts will send your outgoing messages and which accounts you'll check for incoming messages.

NOTE You cannot switch between profiles once Outlook is opened and you've already chosen which profile to open.

So, now that we have a rough understanding of why we need profiles, it's time to get to the nuts and bolts of this column: Setting up those profiles and the e-mail accounts they track for you.

Creating profiles

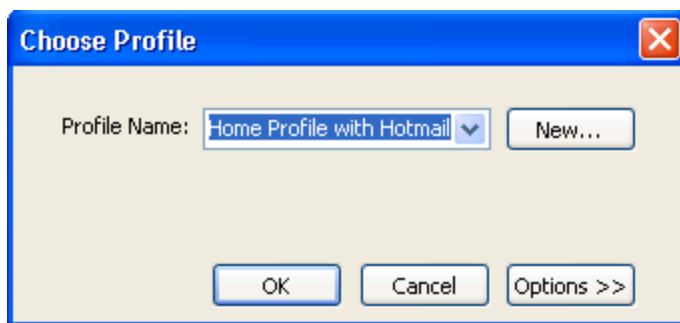
Like I mentioned earlier, the first time you start Outlook, right after you installed it, a profile was created for you. It was so painless that you may not even remember it. So how do you set up another profile, how do you modify an existing one? And how do you choose which one to open?

- Outlook 2007: [Create a new e-mail profile](#)
- Outlook 2003: [Add an Outlook e-mail profile](#)

These Help topics will tell you how to create a new Outlook profile. Once you've gotten to a certain point in the wizard, you'll be able to add as many e-mail accounts as you want. Then, whenever you open Outlook using this particular profile, you can access all your e-mail accounts associated with this profile.

NOTE I did say that you can have as many e-mail accounts as you want associated with this profile, but there is one limitation: If you have more than one Exchange Server account, each one will have to live in its own separate profile.

Everyone on the same page? Great. But you may be wondering how you can choose which profile to open. Good question. When you're setting up the profiles, you can either choose the box that says **Prompt for a profile to be used**, or the one that says **Always use this profile** (below — the drop-down box that lets you choose which one to always use). If you choose the former, when Outlook starts it will ask you which profile you want to open.



Setting up e-mail accounts within your profiles

So, now that you have set up your four profiles (work, personal, wife's work, wife's personal), you can add e-mail accounts to those profiles, and you can do it at any time. You can also remove any accounts, too.

- Outlook 2007: [Add or remove an e-mail account](#)
- Outlook 2003: [Add or remove an e-mail account](#)

Now, once you're in the profile that has the e-mail accounts you want to work with, you can specify which account to use when sending a message:

1. Create a new mail message and under **Accounts** (on the menu bar), click the account you want to use.

NOTE If you don't see Accounts on the menu bar, you only have one e-mail account set up for that particular profile.

You can also specify which accounts from which to receive mail:

- Click the arrow to the right of the **Send/Receive** button on the toolbar, and choose the account from which to check mail, or click **Send/Receive All**.

Feeling secure about your profiles

Now, you may think that setting up separate profiles makes your mail secure. I'm here to tell you that it unfortunately doesn't. Anyone who has access to your computer can get into your profiles. They just have to open Outlook and choose the profile to open. Although you can assign a password to *individual folders* within a Personal Folders file (.pst), you cannot protect Outlook profiles by using a password. If you want to protect your Outlook data from prying eyes, you can use a password-protected Windows user account. For more information, see [Using Outlook on a computer you share with other people](#).

NOTE A .pst is a data file that stores your messages and other items on your computer. You can assign a .pst file to be the default delivery location for e-mail messages. You can use a .pst to organize and back up items for safekeeping.

Let's review

In a nutshell:

- You can have many profiles, all on one computer, each with multiple e-mail accounts (but remember, only one Exchange Server account per profile).
- You can access any of your e-mail accounts from within a profile, but if you want to access a different profile, you have to close Outlook, restart it, and choose which profile to access.
- You can't password-protect a profile, although you can make your mail (not to mention the rest of your computer files) more secure by using a password-protected user account.

And now off you go to live the wild life of someone with multiple profiles. Let's all be careful out there.

"A perpetual holiday is a good working definition of hell." — George Bernard Shaw

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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