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Bringing your mailboxes from another provider: the messages, not just the addresses

Business E-mail & Migration

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Bringing your mailboxes from another provider: the messages, not just the addresses

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Changing hosting provider has an easy part and a part almost everyone discovers late. The easy part is recreating the addresses: five minutes in the panel and `hello@` and `info@` exist again. The hard part is what is **inside** them - years of messages that do not follow on their own.

The **guide to migrating without downtime** tells you to recreate the accounts with the same addresses. This article is the next step: how to bring the messages.

> **!** **Do not cancel the old service yet.**
> The messages live there until they are copied. Cancelling the old plan before bringing them across is the one thing in this process that **cannot be undone** - most providers wipe everything the next day. Cancel once you have checked, and not before.

Three things before you start

1. The **domain has to be on the account** here - if it is not yet, see **how to add another domain or a subdomain**.

2. The **mailboxes have to exist here**, with the same addresses and enough space - see **how to create an e-mail account in cPanel**. A new mailbox usually comes with a small quota; if the old one holds 6 GB, raise it before copying.

3. You will need the **passwords of the old accounts**. If you do not have them, ask the old provider now - that is the request that usually takes longest.

It has to be IMAP on both sides.
This job is done over IMAP, which sees the folders on the server. With POP the messages would be downloaded to the computer and the folder structure would be lost along the way. If you are unsure of the difference, see **POP or IMAP: which to choose**.

Three routes. Pick one

Route	When it is the right one
Ask us	The old provider also runs cPanel. It is the fastest route and the least work for you.
Through your mail program	The old provider is **any of them** - Google, Microsoft, a different panel. It always works, and you can see what is happening.
Copy from the old cPanel	Only when the account here is **empty**. It replaces everything, so it is no good once you have started using the new mailboxes.

Route 1: ask us

If the old provider runs cPanel, the copy is made panel to panel and the mailboxes arrive with folders, read marks and dates intact. Open a ticket with this:

```
Domain:                  yourdomain.ao
Old provider:            name and panel address
Username and password of the old cPanel
Mailboxes to bring:      all / only these
I want ONLY the e-mail, not the website
```

Say it is e-mail only.
A full cPanel migration also brings files and databases, and it **replaces** what is already here. If the new site is already built here, that last line is what protects it.

Route 2: through your mail program

This one works from any provider, and it is what we recommend when there are only a few mailboxes. The idea is simple: put both accounts in the same program and drag the folders from one to the other. The example uses Thunderbird - see **the Thunderbird guide** - but Outlook does the same.

1. Add the **old** account to the program, as **IMAP**, using the old provider's details.

2. Add the **new** account, also as IMAP. Server: `mail.yourdomain.ao`, port **993** with SSL; username: the full address.

3. **Wait for the old account to sync.** This is the step people skip. Until the program has downloaded everything, dragging copies only what it already knows about.

4. On the new account, create the folders with the same names the old one had.

5. Drag **one folder at a time**. Start with a small one to confirm it arrives properly, and only then do the Inbox.

Large accounts take hours, and that is normal.
Five years of mail can be tens of thousands of messages and several gigabytes. Leave the computer on and stop it sleeping, and do not close the program halfway. If the connection drops the program resumes - but only if you leave it open.

Do not drag everything at once.
Selecting ten thousand messages and dropping them into the new account usually ends in a server error partway through, with half copied and no easy way to tell which half. Folder by folder takes the same time and you always know where you are.

Dedicated tools.
There are programs built for this, such as MailStore Home, that copy whole mailboxes without dragging anything. They are useful, but they are third party: Windows only, the free version is for personal use, and we cannot guarantee the result. If the mailbox is large and important, prefer Route 1.

Route 3: copy from the old cPanel

Inside cPanel, mail lives in two folders: `mail` holds the messages and `etc` holds the accounts and their passwords. You download both from the old panel through File Manager and restore them here.

This route wipes whatever is already here.
Restoring those two folders **replaces** the accounts and messages the new account may already hold. Only use it on an account not yet in use. If you are already receiving mail here, use Route 1 or 2.

This is the right order

The delicate part is not the copy - it is when you change the MX record, which is what decides where new mail goes. Do that **last**.

1. Create the mailboxes here and copy the old messages, with the domain still pointing at the old provider. Nothing is interrupted: new mail keeps arriving there.

2. Check. Log into **webmail** and see that the folders and messages are all there.

3. Only now change the **MX** to point here - see **DNS records explained**. From that moment, new mail starts landing in the new mailboxes.

4. **Do not cancel the old service for a few days.** The MX change takes time to reach the whole internet - see **how long DNS changes take to propagate** - and in that window some messages still go to the old place. Copy those last few by hand at the end.

After the MX, the SPF is still to do

With mail now leaving from here, the records that prove your messages are yours have to point here too. If they carry on authorising the old server, your messages start landing in recipients' spam - and the effect shows up days later, when nobody is thinking about the move any more. See **SPF, DKIM and DMARC**.

Finally, reconfigure the team's phones and computers to the new server. Until they do, they carry on reading the old mailbox without realising - and thinking they have stopped receiving mail. If that happens, **why your e-mail is not sending or receiving** has the rest of the path.

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Would you like us to handle moving your mailboxes?

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