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Catch-all, forwarders and aliases: the three that get confused

Webmail & Mailboxes

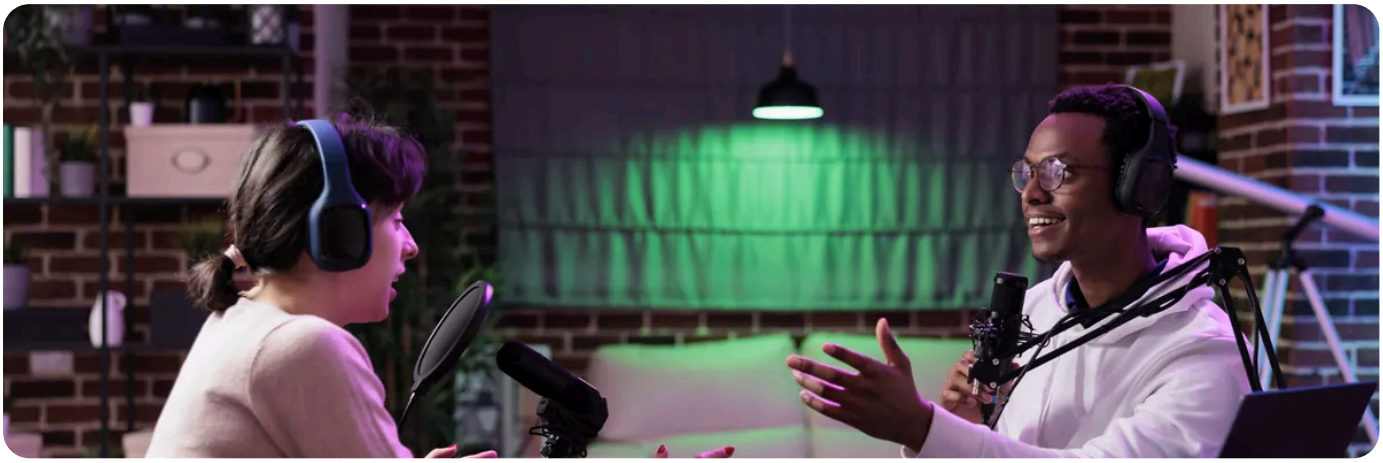
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Catch-all, forwarders and aliases: the three that get confused

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cPanel has three e-mail features that do similar-sounding things and get confused constantly - and picking the wrong one means lost messages or a mailbox full of rubbish. Here they are.

Feature	In one line
E-mail account	A real mailbox, with a password and space. It is the only one that **stores** messages - see **how to create an e-mail account**
Forwarder	A rule that **sends elsewhere** everything arriving at an address. It takes no space and has no password.
Catch-all	Catches everything sent to addresses on your domain that **do not exist**.

Forwarders: the most used rule

Created under *Email* → *Forwarders*. It suits an address you want to publish but not manage: `hello@` landing in the mailbox of whoever answers, `invoices@` going to accounts, or a department address reaching three people at once.

Good for	Bad for
A public name that reaches one person	Receiving and **storing**: a rule keeps nothing. If the destination fails, the message is gone.
Several recipients on one address	Replying. You cannot reply *from* a forwarder - that needs an account.
Addresses that change owner	Sending everything to a Gmail. See the warning below.

Forwarding everything to a Gmail hurts deliverability.
Our server ends up sending Gmail messages that claim to come from third parties. Even with SPF correct, a share of them land in spam **at the other end**, and the domain's reputation suffers for it. If you want to read everything in Gmail, connect the mailbox over IMAP instead. See **SPF, DKIM and DMARC**.

Aliases: several names, one mailbox

In cPanel, an e-mail *alias* is a forwarder pointed at your own mailbox. It gives one person several names: `john@`, `j.smith@` and `sales@` all arriving in the same place.

To reply using one of those names.
In webmail or in your mail program, add the alternative address as an *identity*. You can then choose, when replying, which name appears - with no second mailbox and nothing more to pay. See **how to access your webmail**.

Catch-all: useful, and dangerous if forgotten

Set under *Email → Default Address*. It catches messages sent to addresses that do not exist on your domain - typos like `suport@` instead of `support@`, or the address of someone who left the company.

Switched on and forgotten, it fills with spam.
Spam robots try names at random on every domain they find - *admin@*, *info@*, *anna@*, hundreds a day. With catch-all on, **all of it lands** in one mailbox, which fills up and starts refusing good mail. It is the most common cause of «my mailbox filled up out of nowhere».

cPanel's default option is the saner one: **Discard** - refuse with a notice to the sender. Whoever mistyped gets a message back saying the address does not exist, and corrects it. That beats catching everything in silence.

Use catch-all when	Do not use it when
You are migrating and do not know every address	You want it permanently. Turn it on, see what arrives, create the missing accounts, and turn it off.
The domain is new and there is no spam yet	The domain is old and well known. By then the volume of attempts is already large.
For a short, watched period	As a permanent safety net. For that, create the accounts properly.

Which to choose, in three questions

1. **Do you need to reply from that address?** Then it is an account, or an identity added to an account you already have.

2 **Do you need messages stored at that address?** Then it is an account. Forwarders keep nothing - unless you tick the option to retain a copy.

3 **Is it only so messages reach somebody?** Then it is a forwarder, and it uses no space at all.

If the domain has more than one name pointing here, there is also the *domain* alias, which is a different thing - see **parked domains (aliases)**.

NEED A HAND?

Not sure which of the three solves your case?

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