

She/He/Email

I have been a Hotmail subscriber since the dawn of the Internet, way back when “Googling” or “friending” somebody would end in either a lawsuit or an arrest. Microsoft was known as the most powerful entity in the known universe instead of “that Xbox company,” Napster was still the best way to steal music, and download speeds were measured in lunar cycles.

It was fortunate that I registered so early for Hotmail because I was able to secure the coveted email address, wordweasel@hotmail.com, before anyone else could. You have no idea how much money I’ve been offered for that address.

So for the last thousand of your web years, I’ve been faithfully using the wordweasel Hotmail address, neglecting the seductive pitches from Yahooemail, Gmail, AIM mail, Awoogamail, Hmail, Bazootymail, ABCDEFmail, and some service by the ridiculous name of Windows Live Mail. Nope, I’ve stayed with Hotmail and they’ve stayed with me and that’s the way it’s gonna be.

But like all long-term relationships, we’ve had our ups and downs. Sometimes it’s been a minor spat, with Hotmail shutting down in a huff and me signing out without so much as a word. Oh, we’d stay away from each other for a little while until things cooled off, but I just wouldn’t be able to control myself, and I’d be emailing again the next day, not even remembering what our argument was about in the first place.

But other times we’ve had knock-down drag-out fights, the kind where the police would find me face down on the front lawn in a wife-beater, yelling Hotmail’s name with a pronounced slur.

You see, Hotmail doesn’t tell me what it wants. I would say Hotmail doesn’t tell me what he or she wants, because I don’t think of Hotmail as an it, but that sounds stupid. I can’t call it he, and I can’t call it she, either. If someone can please come up with a genderless animate pronoun that can be used in place of he/she, I personally promise that Bill Gates will give you a penny every time that pronoun is used anywhere on Earth. To collect your fee, just show up at his front door and pound on it wildly until his accountants, Bruno and Mad Dog, show up to explain the payment policy.

But getting back to Hotmail, lately I’ve been doing things it doesn’t like. The problem is,

Hotmail doesn't tell me until after I've done it. For example, I get a lot of emails. If I tried to move every single one of them into folders, I would have absolutely no time to respond to Nigerian princes generously offering me the opportunity to give them \$3000 each. So according to the little indicator at the bottom of my web browser, my Inbox contains roughly 405,987,466,372 messages.

But what Hotmail didn't tell me was that if you go over 5000 messages, you can't use the search function any more. Just like that. Search stops working. No warning that might be helpful, like, say, "Hey doofus, you are about to go over 5000 messages. If you do that, I'm definitely not helping you sift through all that to get it back down to 5000 messages, which is when you can search again. So there." You'd think Hotmail might post that information in huge letters somewhere, because I can tell you, searching through 400 billion messages page by page ain't fun. In fact, it's what drove The Unabomber insane.

Then we came to our latest blowup, a real doozy. I recently sent out a friendly reminder to everybody in my contact list that my web site is now active. Mind you, every single one of these people is a personal friend of Wordweasel. Well, Hotmail was having none of that. In the admirable spirit of Death to Spam, it limited me to sending emails to only 100 people at a time (Wordweasel is popular). Of course, it told me that only *after* I had carefully crafted the email and painstakingly added each person in my contact list.

"You can't do that, start over, hahahahaha," was the gist of the message.

So I did as instructed because I know who wears the pants in this relationship. I duly split the emails up into 100-person chunks and started sending them out. When I got to the last one, it didn't work. I couldn't send it. Hotmail informed me in that sanctimonious tone it has that I had gone over the unspoken limit for number of emails I was allowed to send in a 24-hour period. It never told me how many emails that was, but I would not be able to send any more emails. For 24 hours.

I said some very bad words that described in great detail what Hotmail could go do with itself.

One day in Internet time is approximately the age of the solar system in human time. For the next 24 hours, I tried everything. Begging, threatening, vowing to have an affair with another email service. Nothing worked. Hotmail had cut me off, and nothing would change its mind because I had to learn my lesson.

When Hotmail started working again 24 hours later, I was like a starving Rush Limbaugh hitting the midnight buffet on a Carnival cruise, gorging myself on all that sweet, sweet email. We're back together now, Hotmail and me. Things are still tense. But I hope we can stay a couple long into our golden years, in a world in which email searches are unlimited and Microsoft and Google live in harmonious existence.

Nah, that'll never happen.