

Report

Email Address Internationalization (EAI): Evaluation of Major Email Software and Services

Between

Universal Acceptance Steering Group
(UASG)

And

Catalyst.Net Limited

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Commercial in Confidence

catalyst 

open source technologists

Level 6, Catalyst House, 150 Willis Street, Wellington 6011
PO Box 11053, Manners Street, Wellington 6142, New Zealand
+64 4 499 2267 // enquiries@catalyst.net.nz // www.catalyst.net.nz

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1 Background

The Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) is a community-based organisation working toward the goal of Universal Acceptance (UA), the idea that all domain names and email addresses should be treated correctly and consistently by Internet-enabled applications, devices, and systems. Specifically, this requirement includes new generic top-level domains (gTLDs), internationalized domain names (IDNs), and internationalized email addresses, which must be accepted, validated, stored, processed, and displayed as well as their traditional ASCII-based counterparts.

Because email messages constitute a significant part of online communications, it's important that email software and email service providers meet these requirements to achieve Universal Acceptance. Email Address Internationalization (EAI) is the protocol that allows email addresses that incorporate IDN or Unicode components to function correctly within the email software ecosystem. The purpose of this project is to evaluate the existing EAI capabilities of that ecosystem, in order to measure its "EAI Readiness".

1.1 Project Scope

To achieve this evaluation, a diverse set of components from the email software ecosystem will be analyzed in order to determine the degree to which each component is "EAI Ready", that is, whether it currently handles EAI messages, addresses, and domain names correctly.

The first phase of the project, Discovery and Analysis, will determine how the evaluation should proceed. In particular, it will:

1. Specify the tests and expected results to use for the analysis, and
2. Specify the criteria to use when selecting email software and services to analyze.

1.2 About This Document

This document provides a description of the Discovery and Analysis phase of the EAI Evaluation project, proposed criteria for selecting email software components for analysis, and a preliminary selection of components. It's intended as a snapshot of current activity and a call for feedback rather than a final artifact. Future versions of this document will include evaluation subjects, test cases, procedures, and results as they are developed and collected.

1.3 Further Background

An introduction to UA is provided by [UASG 005](#) (Universal Acceptance Quick Guide).

An introduction to EAI is provided by [UASG 014](#) (Quick Guide to EAI) and [UASG 012](#) (EAI: A Technical Overview).

A list of RFCs relevant to UA and EAI can be found in [UASG 006](#) (Relevant RFCs to Universal Acceptance).

2 Evaluation Procedure

2.1 Test Data

2.2 Test Cases

2.3 Assumptions

2.4 Implementation Details

3 Email Software and Service Ecosystem

Since this project's goal is to measure the EAI Readiness of the email software ecosystem as a whole, care must be taken to avoid any blind spots when selecting components for evaluation.

Although popularity is an obvious and important metric to consider, we cannot simply evaluate the most popular components in absolute terms or we may introduce a bias toward one geographical region, to the exclusion of others. Similarly, we cannot select too heavily from one category of software or we risk missing important EAI “bottlenecks” in the ecosystem. An EAI Ready mail client is of no use if there are no mail servers capable of transporting the messages it sends, for example.

3.1 Selection Criteria

With considerations such as these in mind, we propose four main criteria to consider when selecting components for inclusion in the study.

3.1.1 Popularity

The most obvious metric to consider is popularity. To be included, a component should be widely used. This criterion ensures that each analyzed component contributes significant information to our understanding of the *general behavior* of the email ecosystem. Niche software should not be included unless doing so adds substantially to that understanding.

3.1.2 Diversity

Whether a component contributes diversity, defined broadly as expanding the geographical and language community scope of the evaluation, should also be considered. This criterion ensures that the project produces useful information for as many stakeholders as possible, regardless of language or location.

3.1.3 Breadth

Because an email message is processed by many distinct components on its journey from sender to recipient, a broad set of software types must also be considered. Multiple applications should be selected from each of the categories defined by [UASG 012](#) (cf. *Parts of the mail ecosystem*). This criterion ensures that both end-user

client applications such as Mail User Agents as well as internal systems with no user-facing component such as Mail Submission Agents, Mail Transmission Agents, and Mail Delivery Agents are included. Refer to Email Software Categories for more information about this project's proposed evaluation categories.

3.1.4 Feasibility

Finally, it must in fact be possible to execute an analysis of a given component. Prohibitive license terms may exclude a given piece of software from the evaluation, for example. Security or anti-spam features of web-based services may also make analysis impractical. As such, this criterion can be thought of as ruling components *out* rather than in, and, while reasonable efforts will be made to evaluate the ideal selection of components, if an execution proves unfeasible this will be documented and the project will proceed without it.

3.2 Email Software Categories

Naturally, different types of software have different responsibilities, and so must be evaluated according to different criteria when measuring EAI Readiness.

In user-facing software, visual representation of addresses is a primary concern. For a mobile email client to be considered EAI Ready, for example, it must not only communicate with other software in a way that preserves EAI correctness but it must also accept and display valid email addresses using Unicode (as U-Labels), rather than using their ASCII equivalents (A-Labels). For a mail server, on the other hand, the exact representation of data is less important than whether it stores and transmits messages in an EAI-compatible way.

We have adopted the categories described in [UASG 012](#) for use in this project. These categories partition email-related applications into Mail User Agents, Mail Submission Agents, Mail Transmission Agents, Mail Delivery Agents, and Webmail programs. To these, we add Mail Service Providers as defined by [RFC 5598](#) to describe systems that provide email addresses and mailboxes to consumers or client companies. This yields the following six types of email software:

- **Mail User Agent (MUA):** A client program that provides a user interface for sending, receiving, and managing mail.
- **Mail Submission Agent (MSA):** A server program that receives mail from an MUA and prepares it for transmission and delivery.
- **Mail transmission agent (MTA):** A server program that sends and receives mail to and from other Internet hosts. An MTA may receive mail from an MSA and/or deliver mail to an MDA.
- **Mail delivery agent (MDA):** A server program that handles incoming mail and typically stores it in a mailbox or folder, to be accessed by an MUA. For the purposes of this project, an MDA may also provide access to stored mail through a protocol such as IMAP or POP.
- **Mail Service Provider (MSP):** A system that provides email services and mailbox hosting for other organizations or users, on their behalf. An MSP typically provides some or all of the software types described above, and may also support the creation of new email addresses and mailboxes.

- **Webmail:** A mail client program created using a combination of the user's web browser and web servers that the browser connects to. A webmail application typically provides an MUA, and may also provide some or all of the software types described above.

We have found that, while software seldom fits nicely into a single one of these categories in practice, their names are nonetheless useful for describing the roles and responsibilities of email software components. An application that is nominally a "mail server" may behave as all of MSA, MTA, and MDA, for example, while webmail platforms often behave as both an MUA and MSP at once. As such, components will be evaluated on the basis of these categories as *roles*, with each subject to the test procedures for any role that it intends to fill. Where a given test case cannot be executed because the component does not fill the role under test, this will be indicated as "Not Applicable".

3.3 Email Service and Software Selections

A preliminary selection of service and software components is provided below. These are intended as a starting point for discussion, and to illustrate the consideration of diversity and breadth as selection criteria.

Where possible, the ICANN Geographic Region with which each component is most closely associated is indicated under the **Region** column. This is generally the region in which the component's owning entity or primary development group is located. In situations where no region can be determined, the table has been left blank.

Whether a given component includes any behaviors relevant to each of the software types defined in Email Software Categories is indicated by an **X** in the corresponding column. This is an indication that the component will be subject to that category's test procedures.

3.3.1 Table of Email Software and Service Selections

Software	MUA	MSA	MTA	MDA	MSP	Webmail	Region
Axigen Mail Server	X	X	X	X		X	EUR
MDaemon Email Server	X	X	X	X		X	NA
Microsoft Exchange Server	X	X	X	X		X	NA
Oracle Beehive	X	X	X	X		X	NA
XgenPlus Email Server	X	X	X	X		X	AP
Zimbra	X	X	X	X		X	NA
Coremail	X				X	X	AP
FastMail	X				X	X	AP
Gmail	X				X	X	NA
Mail.ru	X				X	X	EUR
Microsoft Hotmail	X				X	X	NA

Software	MUA	MSA	MTA	MDA	MSP	Webmail	Region
NetEase 163.com	X				X	X	AP
Oath AOL Mail	X				X	X	NA
Oath Yahoo! Mail	X				X	X	NA
Tencent QQ	X				X	X	AP
Rediffmail	X				X	X	AP
Sina	X				X	X	AP
Sohu	X				X	X	AP
Yandex Mail	X				X	X	EUR
IBM Notes	X					X	NA
Microsoft Outlook.com	X					X	NA
Roundcube	X					X	
Apple Mail	X						NA
Microsoft Outlook	X						NA
Microsoft Windows Mail	X						NA
Mozilla Thunderbird	X						NA
Courier		X	X	X			
IBM Domino		X	X	X			NA
James Enterprise Mail Server		X	X	X			NA
Oracle Communications Messaging Server		X	X	X			NA
Exim		X	X				
Halon		X	X				EUR
OpenSMTPD		X	X				NA
Postfix		X	X				
Sendmail		X	X				NA
Dovecot				X			
Fetchmail				X			
Procmal				X			

4 Results

4.1 Execution Summary

4.2 Test Outputs

5 Document History

Version	Author	Date	Description
0.1	Evan Hanson	19 June 2018	Preliminary selection criteria and component selection.
0.2	Evan Hanson	29 June 2018	Reformatting, clarifications, and additional components.
0.3	Evan Hanson	3 July 2018	Clarification of MDA category and software table corrections.