



## The 90-Day Rule for Email



Most mail accounts are somewhat out of control; many are wildly beyond help. I regularly see tens of thousands of emails in the main inbox of Outlook, or sometimes Thunderbird. These users are using word search to find mail that arrived on the same day. They don't sort their mail, and have problems keeping up. Yes, you know who you are. Of course, those who need the lessons below are least likely to know that it has arrived in their email, but that's pretty much standard operating procedure.

### Why It's a Problem

Well, not replying to emails is obvious. But lost time searching, missing invoices and opportunities, and a general loss of control are also part of the problem. On the technical side, big inboxes load slowly. In Outlook, mailbox files (PST or OST files) become troublesome above 10 Gb, and stop dead at 50 Gb. Thunderbird doesn't break down much, but big mailboxes are slower there as well. If you're saving all your mail on your mail server instead of locally (using 'IMAP' settings), then that big mailbox will sync to all your devices, and they'll all share the same clutter and performance issues.

Well, can you just take all the mail in the inbox, sort it by date, and then push it out by year to a folder, say 'Inbox archive 2018' and so on? That works well in

Thunderbird. In Outlook, it helps, but the total mailbox size is still a problem. You can, however, push out those annual file sets to an archive, basically a second and separate PST file, which is still available in the left column of Outlook. Here are Microsoft's instructions on how to create that archive.

<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/archive-older-items-automatically-25f44f07-9b80-4107-841c-41dc38296667>

That won't help your current year's inbox, and your productivity. You need to deal with email by touching as much as possible only once. Deleting junk on first sight, maybe.

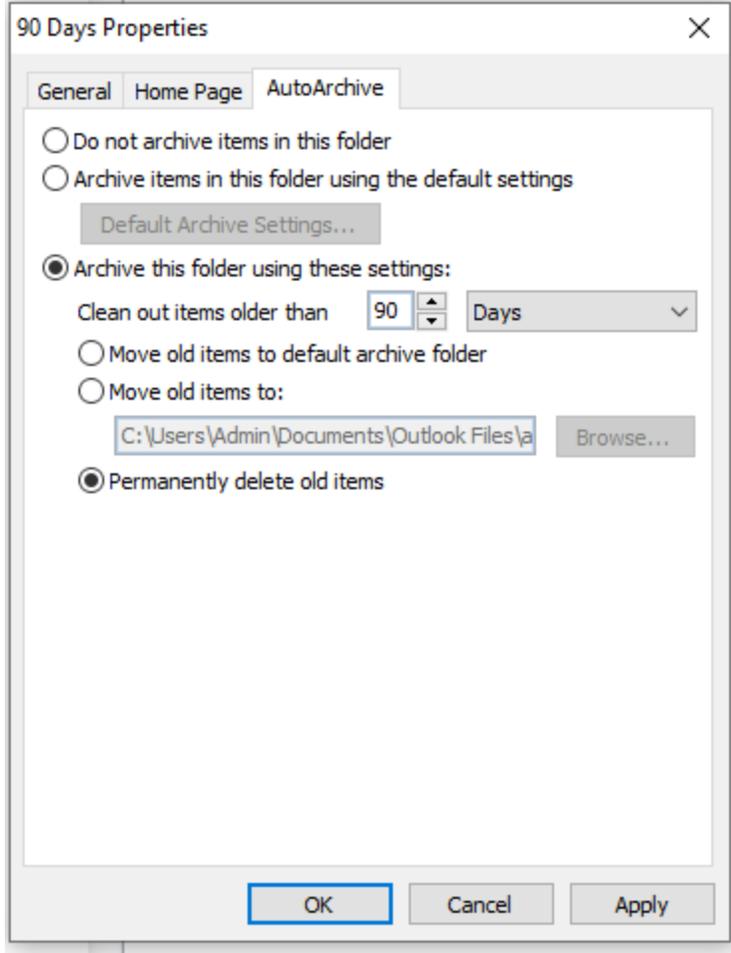
Should you unsubscribe from advertising? Yes, if it's not useful, and if the company sending it is a real company with an actual mailing address, then click the unsubscribe link and most of them will honor it. If not, there are ways to block senders who abuse your mailbox; call me for help.

## **Keep It. But Not Forever!**

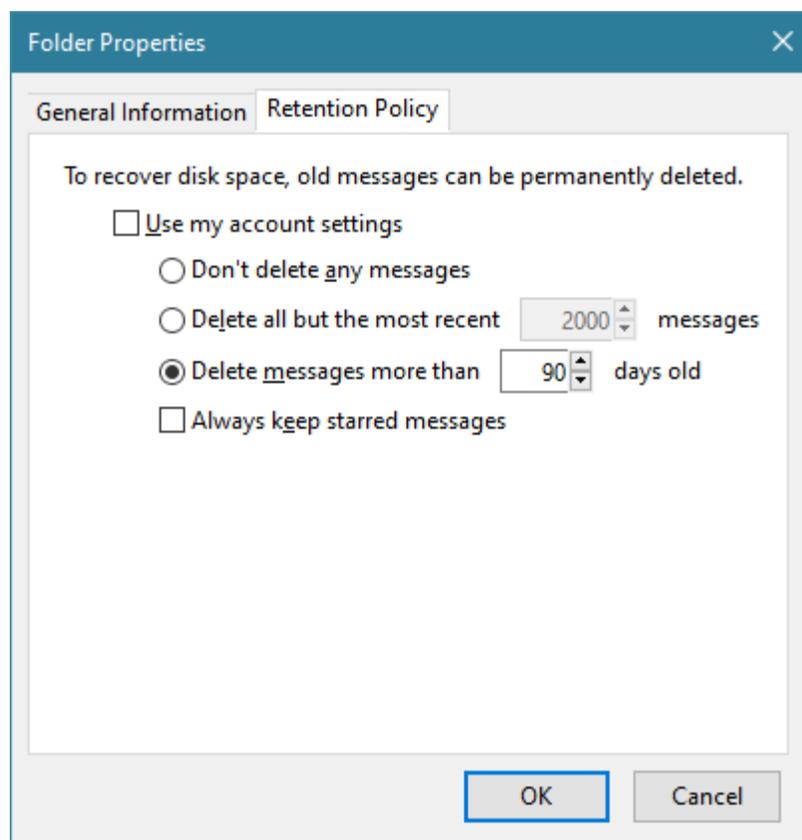
But around half of my email is information that I might want to refer to, but probably won't. There are sale announcements from repeat vendors, useless after three days. Webinar invitations, two weeks or less until those are over, marketing materials of most kinds, password reset links and confirmations that I should keep for a few days, shipping confirmations, 'your package arrived' confirmations, and many, many more. I don't want this stuff in my inbox, and I really don't want it in my permanent email archives. I also don't want to delete it immediately on arrival, and I also don't want to manage it twice. It should stick around out of my way until there's no more need for it, and then go away.

The solution is easy. Create a folder, let's call it "90 Days". Anything that arrives in the "If I haven't read this or needed this by 90 days, it's trash" category can go directly into the "90 Days" folder. Or choose the number you prefer; I've found 90 days to work well. Yes, it's one more thing to manage, unless you tell your mail software to handle that for you.

In Outlook, right-click the '90 Day' folder, choose 'Properties', and go to the 'AutoArchive' tab. Choose 'Archive this folder using these settings:', set 'Clean out items older than 90 days' and 'Permanently delete old items'. Click OK on your way back out.



In Thunderbird, right-click on the folder, and choose 'Folder Properties', and then go to the tab at top, 'Retention Policy' and choose 'Delete messages more than \_\_\_ days old' and fill in 90 days. OK your way back out.



Does a 90-Day folder fix email overload? Not remotely. But I have folders for Vendors, Clients, and Services, and subfolders inside them, and anything that no longer needs action goes to one of those storage folders if I need a record of it, or to 90 Days if I don't. Some of the storage folders also have by-year subfolders to deal with all the emails that happen when you're working with a client or organization for decades. I still have to use search sometimes, and both Thunderbird and Outlook are good at searching. But there's so much less stuff to deal with since I started my 90-day folder a decade back, and it's all manageable.

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## Back To School

Google has a new game that teaches smart internet use. They're teaching what to do, or not, online, with five key lessons:

- Be Internet Smart: Share with care
- Be Internet Alert: Don't fall for fake
- Be Internet Strong: Secure your secrets
- Be Internet Kind: It's cool to be kind
- Be Internet Brave: When in doubt, talk it out

It's intended for students, second-grade through sixth, but the "Don't fall for fake" section may be useful for some older internet novices as well, if somewhat cute.

Read about it here:

<https://www.blog.google/technology/families/be-internet-awesome-helping-kids-make-smart-decisions-online/>

And try the game yourself here:

[https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en\\_us/interland](https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/interland)

Or Google has their own shortcut:

[g.co/interland](https://g.co/interland)

Hint for better viewing: In most browsers, pressing F11 switches to full-screen, and pressing it again returns to normal view. That's on nearly all web sites, not just Interland.



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