

Early Microsoft Email

From 1988 to 1996, how many users were using Microsoft software to interface with X.400 and SMTP and the other email protocols

There is no precise or comprehensive historical count of the exact number of users who interfaced with X.400, SMTP, and other email protocols specifically using Microsoft software between 1988 and 1996. However, historical data regarding Microsoft's early corporate deployments, the global scale of email at the time, and its software beta programs provide clear boundaries on these numbers:

1. Global Context and Early Adopters

- **The Global Pool:** Worldwide email adoption was remarkably small during this period. In **1988**, there were only about **500,000 email addresses globally**. By **1992**, that number grew to **5 million**, and reached **25 million by 1996**.
- **Microsoft Mail:** Microsoft entered this market in 1988 with Microsoft Mail (initially for the Mac). It primarily operated on local area networks (LANs) using proprietary structures. To interface with X.400 or SMTP, companies had to purchase separate, specialized **"foreign gateways"** (such as the Microsoft Mail Gateway to SMTP). Because these gateways were expensive and complex, they were typically deployed only at the corporate server level rather than by individual end-users.

2. Internal Deployment ("Dogfooding")

- Within Microsoft itself, the transition to native X.400 protocols was strictly controlled.
- By April 1993, Microsoft's internal IT group was managing **160 [Xenix-based](#) mail servers**.
- When Microsoft internally migrated to its newly developed, X.400-based Microsoft Exchange Server 4.0 framework, **32,000 internal Microsoft mailboxes** were active on the system by April 1996.

3. Public Release and Beta Metrics

- **The Early Adopter Program:** During the development of [Exchange Server](#) leading up to its official launch in early 1996, Microsoft ran a massive beta program.
- More than **60,000 corporate, government, and education customers** ran Exchange Server in production environments.
- Because Exchange Server 4.0 was built natively on the X.400/X.500 model while simultaneously supporting SMTP (via the Internet Mail Connector), these 60,000+ early organizational clients represent the primary baseline of users interfacing with both protocols via Microsoft software at the tail end of your timeframe.

Ultimately, SMTP won the "protocol wars" shortly thereafter, and Microsoft eventually phased out its X.400 Message Transport Agent components entirely.

Are you looking for information on a **specific Microsoft product** from this era (e.g., MS Mail vs Exchange Server 4.0), or are you researching the **broader Protocol Wars** between X.400 and SMTP? Let me know so I can tailor the next details.

Just looking at the timeline, and actual numbers, with [AOL](#) the biggest in those early years, with Microsoft apparently number two.

Evaluating the consumer market reveals that **AOL was the undisputed giant, while Microsoft was a distant challenger trying to catch up.**

Initially, the "Big Three" of the early-to-mid 1990s dial-up era were **AOL**, **CompuServe**, and **Prodigy**. Microsoft did not even enter the consumer online service provider space until August 1995, when it launched **The Microsoft Network (MSN)** alongside Windows 95.

By the end of your 1996 timeline, the consumer landscape stood as follows:

1. Consumer Subscriber Metrics (Mid-to-Late 1996)

The gap between America Online and Microsoft in the consumer sector was substantial:

Service	Launch Year	Subscriber Count (1996)	Protocol Handling
AOL (America Online)	1989	~6.2 to 7 million	Proprietary Gateway to SMTP. AOL ran a completely closed, proprietary ecosystem. In 1993, it built an internal gateway so users could send email out to the broader Internet via SMTP, but the users themselves never touched SMTP directly.
MSN (The Microsoft Network)	1995	~1 to 1.5 million	Proprietary to Native Internet. MSN initially launched as a proprietary network (like AOL) but pivotally re-engineered itself in 1996 ("MSN 2.0") to interface directly through standard internet browsers and standard internet email protocols.

2. The Nuance: The Corporate vs. Consumer Split

While AOL dominated the consumer dial-up market, the narrative of Microsoft being "number two" shifts depending on which sector is examined:

- **In the Consumer Market:** Microsoft was actually **number four** for most of 1995/1996, trailing behind AOL, CompuServe, and Prodigy. It achieved "fastest growth" metrics by hitting 1 million subscribers in its first seven months, purely because MSN was bundled into every copy of Windows 95.
- **In the Corporate Market:** This is where Microsoft held immense power. While consumer users were on AOL, millions of office workers were using **Microsoft Mail** and early **Exchange 4.0** deployments. These corporate setups connected entire office grids locally, utilizing X.400 and SMTP server gateways to send data externally.

3. The 1996 Turning Point

By late 1996, both companies realized that closed, proprietary email systems were losing ground to the open Internet.

1. **AOL** switched to a flat-rate \$19.95/month unlimited pricing model in late 1996, which exploded its user base past 10 million shortly after, but heavily congested its servers.
2. **Microsoft** released **Internet Mail and News 1.0** (which would soon become *Outlook Express*) as part of Internet Explorer 3 in 1996. This software allowed anyone—regardless of whether they used AOL, MSN, or a local ISP—to interface natively with standard SMTP servers.
1. **The Webmail Shock:** Just as Microsoft and AOL fought for dial-up dominance, **Hotmail launched in July 1996**, allowing users to bypass proprietary client software entirely. Sensing the shift, Microsoft bought Hotmail in 1997 for \$400 million to instantly secure tens of millions of pure SMTP internet email users.

**** End of Page**