

Is ITU-T MHS (Message Handling System) different to Novell MHS

Yes, **ITU-T MHS** and **Novell MHS** are completely different things, though they both share the same general name—**Message Handling System (MHS)**.

ITU-T MHS (International Standards)

- **What it is:** A broad, international conceptual framework and standard defined by the ITU-T (International Telecommunication Union) under the **X.400-series** recommendations.
- **Purpose:** It specifies how large-scale, heterogeneous, and global communication networks (such as electronic mail, fax, telex, and voicemail) can interconnect and exchange messages using the [OSI](#) (Open Systems Interconnection) model.
- **Scope:** It is an open, vendor-neutral architectural blueprint defining abstract services, Message Transfer Agents (MTAs), and Message Stores (MSs).

Novell MHS (Product/Implementation)

- **What it is:** A specific, proprietary store-and-forward electronic mail and transport software platform originally created by Action Technologies and licensed/purchased by Novell for NetWare networks.
- **Purpose:** It acted as a local back-end messaging engine and transport layer on Novell NetWare file servers, allowing local users and third-party email packages (like DaVinci Mail) to route messages across a local area network (LAN).
- **Scope:** It is a concrete software product tailored strictly to Novell's network operating system architecture rather than a global telecommunications standard.

Key Differences at a Glance

- **Definition:** **ITU-T MHS** is a global, open telecommunications standard; **Novell MHS** is a specific LAN-based software product for NetWare.
- **Function:** **ITU-T MHS** defines a universal architecture for all types of messaging media; **Novell MHS** handled file-server-based electronic mail routing and messaging application APIs (like SMF-70/SMF-71).

If you're researching legacy networking or working with an old system migration, let me know if you need help with **NetWare components** or **X.400 mail gateways**.

In 1988, early days of Novell MHS, were they similar

No. Even in **1988**, when [Novell](#) first licensed the product from Action Technologies, Inc. (ATI), **they were fundamentally different in concept, scale, and design.**

Though both were gaining rapid industry traction in 1988, their relationship was more like **a real-world highway system vs. an architectural blueprint for a hyper-futuristic global rail network.**

Here is why they were entirely different, even at that specific moment in tech history:

1. Architectural Blueprint vs. Bare-Metal Code

- **ITU-T MHS (The Blueprint):** In 1988, the ITU-T was busy publishing its famous **1988 X.400 Blue Book standards**. This was a massive, highly complex text document defining how global telecom carriers should handle email envelope routing (P1 protocol) and multimedia content (P22 protocol). It wasn't something you bought on a floppy disk; it was a conceptual architecture.
- **Novell MHS (The Product):** In contrast, Novell MHS was a **lightweight, practical piece of software** written in compiled code. It ran on top of MS-DOS and NetWare file servers.

2. File-Based Sharing vs. Protocol-Driven Stepping

- **Novell MHS** relied on an incredibly simple, low-overhead mechanism: **file-based directory structures**. To send an email, a DOS mail client (like DaVinci Mail) literally wrote a structured text file containing an email envelope header and body into a specific directory on a shared NetWare hard drive. The MHS engine polled that directory, picked up the file, and moved it to another directory.
- **ITU-T MHS (X.400)** relied on complex, session-oriented network connections following the heavy **OSI 7-layer networking model**. It required systems to interact dynamically via standardized APIs, connection handshakes, and strict protocol machine layers.

3. Local Area Networks (LAN) vs. Global Telecom Carriers

- **Novell MHS** was built explicitly to solve a massive 1988 problem: connecting office workers in the same building over a Local Area Network (LAN). It excelled at passing mail between small groups of users on shared physical drives.
- **ITU-T MHS** was funded and designed primarily by massive government and enterprise organizations (like European PTT authorities—Post, Telephone, and Telegraph). They intended it to operate as a heavy, commercial wide-area network (WAN) backbone connecting entire countries and multinational corporations.

The Only Direct Interaction: Gateways

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the only way these two "MHS" implementations touched was through **gateways**. Developers realized that if a company used Novell MHS locally but wanted to email someone across the world on an enterprise corporate network, they needed a translation bridge. Third-party developers built **Novell MHS-to-X.400 gateways**, which translated Novell's local, file-based text headers into formal ITU-T X.400 data envelopes.

Are you exploring this from a **historical perspective** of late-80s networking, or are you looking for details on how **early PC applications** (like Lotus or Ashton-Tate frameworks) integrated with Novell's architecture back then?

Just documenting the differences. Thanks, I'll save this page.

Since you are saving this page, I will leave it exactly as it is. If you ever need to expand your notes in the future with technical details on **early LAN email clients**, **SMF (Standard Message Format) headers**, or the **NetWare architecture** of that era, just reply to this thread.

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