

Thunderbird 2 Flies Ahead, Racing Web Mail

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The new version of Thunderbird, the free, open-source mail client from the organization behind the Firefox Web browser, is a nicely polished application that makes it easy to sort, view and generally manage your daily e-mail load. But while Thunderbird 2 looks promising, it must face one important question: Do e-mail clients matter anymore?

To a certain degree, Mozilla's Thunderbird could be a victim of the success of its browser sibling. As next-generation browsers like Firefox have become better at supporting highly interactive GUIs for browser-based applications, managing e-mail strictly through a Web interface has become much less of a chore, and, for some people, has even replaced desktop mail clients as the first choice for dealing with e-mail.

Still, there are many areas where a desktop-based mail client is superior to a Web-based one, especially in the area of offline mail. And for those looking for a good (and free) mail client, Thunderbird answers the bill.

In our tests of Thunderbird 2, we found the most welcome new feature to be the tagging ability, which replaces the labels feature from previous versions.

With the new tagging feature we were able to apply multiple tags to an e-mail message and, best of all, we could create new ones on the fly. We found this to be very useful for managing our mail, making it much easier to classify messages based on groups and topics.

The pop-up alerts when new messages arrive have also been improved in Thunderbird 2; they now work more like Outlook alerts by providing information such as sender, subject and message text.

Extensions and add-ons are tightly integrated in Thunderbird and, as is the case with Firefox, can add lots of new functionality, such as calendaring. However, installing extensions in Thunderbird doesn't have the one-click simplicity that it does in Firefox. To install an extension in Thunderbird, users must download the file and then install it from the Add-Ons window.

There are several enhancements to navigating the mail interface in Thunderbird 2, with two of the most notable being sortable views in the Folders pane and the inclusion of browser-like Back and Forward buttons for navigating messages.

Thunderbird 2 also includes some pre-built options that make it very simple to configure it to work with two of the most popular mail services, namely Google's Gmail and Apple's .Mac (which is only on the Mac version of Thunderbird).

To download Thunderbird 2, go [here](#).

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