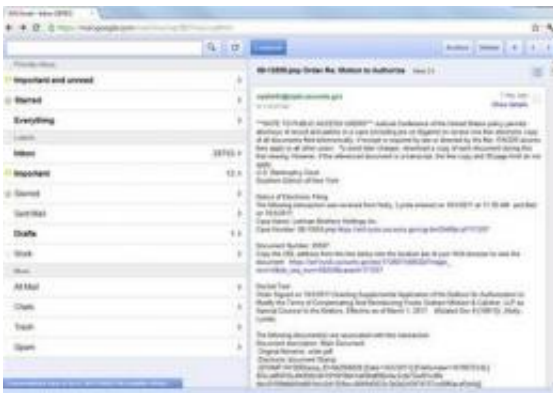


Review: Offline Gmail app good for casual use

October 7 2011, By ANICK JESDANUN , AP Technology Writer



This screen shot shows Google's new offline software for using Gmail without an Internet connection. Google's new software for using Gmail without an Internet connection comes across as a throwback to an era when we weren't connected all the time and on all sorts of devices, from phones to iPads. (AP Photo)

Google's new software for using Gmail without an Internet connection comes across as a throwback to an era when we weren't connected all the time and on all sorts of devices, from phones to iPads.

These days, if I need to read or write an email when I'm not at a regular computer, I can usually do so on my phone. Wi-Fi is also plentiful -even on planes and trains- when I need to catch up on messaging using my laptop.

But I found myself lacking both options during a recent trip abroad.

Fortunately, [Google](#) recently came out with Offline Google Mail, [software](#) that lets me use Gmail while disconnected. [Messages](#) that I write, delete or move to a folder - or label, as Gmail calls it - get synced with my Gmail account the next time I'm online. I can also read messages that had been sent to me before going offline.

As a result, I was generally able to get away with buying a half-hour or an hour of Internet access at a time in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, where "complimentary Internet" is a term foreign to hotels.

I composed emails on a flight to New Zealand and had them sent during a brief layover at the Auckland airport. I read and wrote more emails on the flight back to the U.S. and synced the account once more at my parents' home in New Jersey. By the time I was back in my apartment in New York, I was caught up on three weeks of email.

The software itself was easy to install and use - once I found it. It requires a [Gmail account](#) and won't work with Yahoo, Hotmail and other Web-based email services.

Also, it works only with Google's Chrome browser, which means I had to install it on my laptop to start things off. I then had to open the browser and open a new tab to find a link to Google's Chrome [Web Store](#). After that, I had to find the free Offline Google Mail software among the scores of offerings at the store.

The software is still in a "beta" test mode, a label that Google Inc. sometimes slaps on products for months or years. That's a way of saying that you may encounter glitches along the way.

I indeed ran into a few problems.

The key problem is that messages stored offline sometimes disappears.

That included an email I had composed to send later. As a result, I wasn't able to depend on the software to retrieve notes that I had stored as email messages, nor was I able to respond to a number of emails that went missing.

I learned from Google later that the software typically keeps only messages from the past three days and sometimes up to a week. It also keeps older messages that Google's technology thinks is important. Drafts and messages marked with a star are always stored, but you have to remember to do that in the short time you might have online.

The software also failed at times to store attachments, which is a problem when someone sends me a document I need to review. I might have run into a storage cap of 25 megabytes for all attachments combined, which isn't much when Gmail allows attachments that large on a single email. The software was also inconsistent in loading images, which means I could miss good deals from retailers that spell out offers in graphics.

Two other faults: There are limits in my ability to organize messages using labels. I could attach existing ones, but I couldn't create new ones. That could keep my main inbox cluttered. And the interface feels like Gmail of the early days, not the dynamic website of today that grew out of years of user feedback, redesigns and upgrades.

That said, Offline Google Mail largely does what it is supposed to do. It gives you access to your messages - your digital life - when an Internet connection isn't readily available. It also gives you the ability to write emails anytime you want, as long as there's no urgency in sending them.

It's similar to the way I read and wrote email more than a decade ago, using Netscape software and getting online through a dial-up modem every now and then to send messages and get new ones.

When you do have that [Internet connection](#), the Google software syncs your mail automatically, as long as you have the Chrome browser open. There's no need to open Offline Google Mail or even visit Gmail.com.

Standalone email software such as Thunderbird also lets you read and write messages while offline, but you need to open the software to sync. You also need to know how to set it up for [Gmail](#), while there's no need to configure anything for Offline Google Mail.

I wouldn't rely on Google's software, though, if you absolutely must have access to your messages all the time. The product is too new and has glitches and storage limitations that are bound to strike when you can least afford them.

Still, it's a good alternative to standalone software when you need only casual access to your messages offline. It's simple to use and it does the job - most of the time.

©2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Review: Offline Gmail app good for casual use (2011, October 7) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-offline-gmail-app-good-casual.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--