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Using Braille2000: The B-Mail™ Messaging System

Overview

B-Mail™ is like E-mail, only exclusively for Braille2000 users. B-Mail provides a secure SPAM-free environment in which Braille2000 users can exchange notes and data files. B-Mail is particularly welcomed at Computer Application Specialties Company where SPAM has taken over and amounts to 99% of all incoming email. There is so much SPAM that email is effectively useless. That's pretty sad. Fortunately B-Mail will never have that problem.

B-Mail is a closed, private mail system. To use B-Mail at all you must have a Braille2000 license number which acts as your mailbox identifier or your B-Mail account number. And you must register with the B-Mail server (done via Braille2000 the first time you use B-Mail). Every Braille2000 license thus represents a unique potential B-Mail user. Because B-Mail operates in a closed environment, there can never be any SPAM. But it also means that you can't reach regular public email addresses via B-Mail. The only people you can reach are other Braille2000 users and a new category we call "Friends of Braille2000". Friends are non-transcribers who don't use Braille2000 but who buy yearly subscriptions to B-Mail so they can send and receive B-Mail from transcribers.

B-Mail makes an ideal way to send finished transcriptions to the production center to be embossed. Unlike standard email attachments, files attached to B-Mail are automatically compressed for transmission and there is no attachment-encoding penalty with B-Mail like there is with regular email. And because B-Mail is integrated into Braille2000, it is easy to send the current braille file, or an entire Braille2000 project, using the "Send via Internet" function in the Braille2000 File Management area. It would not be surprising for B-Mail to make "diskettes in the mail" a thing of the past.

To give Braille2000 users a sense of membership, B-Mail provides three publicly shared address books, one for individuals, one for organizations (businesses, agencies, production centers, etc.), and one for memberships (mail distribution lists which B-Mail users may join). Each user can decide whether to be listed in the shared address books or not.

Free B-Mail service is provided with all licensed editions of Braille2000, including The Student Edition. B-Mail is not available in unlicensed evaluation-only copies of Braille2000.

B-Mail is a shared resource. You are expected to use B-Mail wisely and reasonably. Although there are no enforced limits on attached file size, attachments totaling more than about 2 megabytes (i.e., about the same as two diskettes) are not desirable and could clog the system.

B-Mail™ Basics

Your Braille2000 license number is your B-Mail account number. When used as a mail address it is written between angle brackets, such as <1000CASC0001> which happens to be the account

number for Computer Application Specialties Company (you can use this account number to correspond with us).

To send B-Mail to someone all you need to know is their account number and that alone in the "To" box is sufficient. To make the mail more pleasant, you can also include the name of the person or organization, provided you place the name ahead of the account number (i.e., with the account number being the rightmost element in the "To" box. Although you can type in the account to which you want to send a message, you would normally select the address from the Address Book.

To help you manage B-Mail accounts there is a built-in Address Book which is composed of five lists of accounts.

My Private Addresses

This part of the Address Book contains entries automatically recorded from all accounts to which you have sent B-Mail and from which you have received B-Mail. The little down-arrow button at the right end of the "To" box lists the items in the private Address Book for quick reuse.

My Memberships

This part of the Address Book lists the Membership Lists that you have joined. You can leave any list at any time.

Public Individuals

This part of the Address Book originates at the B-Mail server (your copy is updated on demand, via the "Update from Server" button). The server collects voluntary submissions of one's own name and account number to be shared with the B-Mail community. You can post your own entry via the "Add Entry" button. Placing your name in the Public Individuals address book is not required but it is a convenience to others.

Public Organizations

This part of the Address Book also originates at the B-Mail server and operates exactly the same as the Public Individuals listing. The Public Groups list is where to submit contact information for your braille group, business, service, or production center. The "Add Entry" function should be performed by the individual who on behalf of the named group will be reading group B-Mail. This account can be listed both for a named individual and for a named group, as situations dictate.

Your own entry may be withdrawn from a public listing by using the Delete Entry button. This button can also remove any entry from your Private address book.

Public Memberships

A Membership is an account people can "join" and "leave". When a B-Mail message is sent to the membership account, it goes to all those that have joined, as in a broadcast message.

There are both public and private memberships. Public (unproctored) memberships may be joined by anyone. Private (proctored) memberships may be joined only by those that know the password. A proctored membership might be used, for example, to broadcast messages to all the members of a particular transcriber group.

How to Send New B-Mail

The B-Mail system provides two different functions merged together: it can transmit messages and/or it can transmit files. When the main purpose is merely to transmit files, entrance to B-Mail services is best accomplished using the "Send via Internet" function of the File Manager. This alternative approach is discussed later. This section will cover sending B-Mail when a message is the primary item.

You get to the main B-Mail™-Listing window via the View button and "Mail". The listing window presents lists of B-Mail messages that are stored on your own computer, in one of the B-Mail folders ("Sent", "Received", "Archive"; "Outbox" is not currently used).

To originate a new B-Mail message, click the "Send To" button. This will give you the B-Mail™-Item window for the outgoing mail. B-Mail supports only one window for outgoing mail at any given time. In this window, the "From" box is already filled in with your own name and account number. If you wish to change the name part of the From address), click the "Set My Identity" button and put in your name (don't enter any account number, it will be added automatically). You cannot generate B-Mail using any From account other than your own.

You can type the recipient's account number into the "To" box (remember to enclose the 12-character account number in angle brackets). Easier is to click the "down arrow" button and select a recently used name and account from your Private address book. Or you can click the Address Book icon to go to the Address Book window where you can access the public address lists. If you go to the Address Book, clicking "Send To" in the Address Book window or double-clicking on an entry in the Address Book will bring that address into the "To" box on your outgoing B-Mail.

You can type a subject phrase into the Subject box or leave it blank.

Then you can type your message into the Message box. Via right-button clicking in the Message box you can access the standard editing functions of Cut/Copy/Paste and control the font.

When your message is complete, you can click the Send button to transmit your B-Mail to the server. If you use a dial-up Internet connection, doing this should trigger the autodial function and a connection should be established. If an error occurs, you may need to connect to your Internet service yourself before using Send or other server action buttons in B-Mail.

A complete copy of each message sent to the server is placed in your "Sent" folder. You can inspect any one of these messages by selecting "Sent" in the "Folder" setting of the B-Mail™-Listing window.

How to Check For and Receive New Mail

The B-Mail™ system is a "single post office" system. Messages you send out are stored on the server in the "mailbox" (file) for the recipient. At some later time, when the recipient queries the server for mail, your message will be delivered. Querying the server is done with the "Check Mail" button in the Braille2000 control panel (the toolbar at the left of the Braille2000 window). You can also have the system check for mail automatically, when you start Braille2000 or at 15 minute intervals. When message for you are found at the server, the "Check Mail" button changes to "You Have Mail" and changes color. When the button reads "You Have Mail" clicking the button shows the mail-Listing window and fetches the messages from the server.

You can also check for new mail using the "Get New Mail" button located in the B-Mail™-Listing window itself. If your Internet connection is by dial-up service, clicking any of these buttons should trigger the autodial function and establish a connection. If that does not happen, you may need to establish your Internet connection manually before checking for mail.

If you do have mail waiting, it is transferred from the server to your computer. The new items show up at the top of the listing for the "Received" folder. Entries in this folder are arranged (by default) in reverse chronological order, newest B-Mail first. Items that are new show "Unread" in the Status column. Once you have looked at a message it shows as "Read".

Checking for new mail not only queries the server for new incoming mail, it also queries for the current status of mail you have sent. Using information from the server, the B-Mail™ system will update the status of messages located in your "Sent" folder. When the recipient of your mail retrieves the message from the server, the next time you check for new mail the server will change the Status of the sent message from merely "Sent" to "Received". When a message in your Sent folder shows "Received" as its Status, it means that the recipient has obtained the message from the Server.

B-Mail messages are transmitted whole, delivering both message text and all attached files at the same time (when you click either "You Have Mail" or "Get New Mail"). For big attached files and when working over dial-up Internet links it could take many minutes to transfer all the data. Note that B-Mail transmissions are compressed to try to minimize the transfer delay and to improve data security.

You can read any message showing in the B-Mail™-Listing box by clicking the Open button or by double-clicking on an item in the list. You may open multiple messages concurrently, each showing in its own B-Mail™-Item window. (Multiple Item windows may exist showing messages already at hand; only one Item window may be open composing a new outgoing message.)

You can get additional information about the sender of a message by clicking the Profile button. This button contacts the server to get the senders registration data. B-Mail users, when they register, can mark data items public or private. You get to see only the registration items that were marked public.

How to Use "Send via Internet"

If you click the File Management button (near the top of the Braille2000 control panel), you will find a management task called "Send via Internet". This tool collects files into a B-Mail message in order to send them across the Internet.

The "To" box is set by default to the B-Mail address used for the last outgoing B-Mail message. Just as in an outgoing message window, the down-arrow button lists entries in your Private address book and the Address Book icon takes you to the Address Book window where you can access the public listings.

The subject line defaults to "Delivery of braille files" but you can change it to anything you like.

If you leave the checkmark "Show the message box: I want to enter a message" blank, the B-Mail message will be sent without any message text, merely to transfer the file or files designated. If you put a checkmark in this box, the regular B-Mail outgoing message box will show after you click OK, so you can type your message and then click the Send button.

Remember that the purpose of the "Send via Internet" tool is to transmit files. You can choose between "Send only the current file" (meaning the file showing in the Braille2000 editing panel) and "Send all files in the current project" (meaning all files in the project whose name appears at the top of the Braille2000 control panel). If the recipient needs the files in some other braille file format, you can put a checkmark in "Convert braille files to" and select the desired file format. Note that when this checkmark is clear, files are sent "as-is" and can be of any type, including non-braille files. But when the checkmark is set, **all** files must be braille files and they will **all** be converted to the designated type, including attempts (which may not work well) to convert files that are in the project but which do not contain braille.

Adding and Removing Files in the Attached Files List

Each outgoing message may carry with it zero or more attached files. File data, like all parts of the B-Mail message will be compressed to save time and boost security. When you originate an outgoing message via "Send To", the attached files list will begin empty. When you originate an outgoing message via "Send via Internet" (and also add the checkmark for "Show the message box...") the attached files list will show the current file or all project files, based on your selection at "Send via Internet".

To add another file to the list, click the Add button and select one of four sources for the file.

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| Braille File | An open-type dialog box appears, through which you select the file to add to the list. "Look in:" is preset to the current Braille2000 project folder. You can add any file of any type (but please, not too big). |
| Project | A Braille2000 project list dialog box appears. You select a project and all files in that project are added to the list. (If you wish, you can Remove any you don't want to send.) |
| Workarea | The submenu lists all the current workareas (names from the View Selector tabs of the main Braille2000 editing window, i.e., those files currently open). Unnamed workareas are not listed. Click the workarea you want. Its filename is added to the list. |
| Diagnostics | For solving Braille2000 behavior problems, there is a mechanism for the collection of operating data. As directed by us during a problem consultation, this choice attaches diagnostic data to the B-Mail message so you can send it to us for analysis. |

You can remove one or more items from the attached files list by selecting the entries and clicking the Remove button.

How to Receive Attached Files From Others

When you view a message, the B-Mail™-Item window shows you the message text and the listing of attached files. At the top of that listing are the buttons "Extract Some" and "Extract All" and the checkbox for "Ignore folders".

In the typical B-Mail message, files are listed with one level of folder context, i.e., the name of the immediately containing folder from the home location of the file. This initial folder name is most often the Braille2000 project name from the sender's computer. This name helps you know

what the data are, especially if the standard volume naming scheme was used (in which the files are named 001.ABT, 002.ABT, etc.).

If you put a checkmark in "Ignore folders," the folder names in the attached files list will be removed, except when such removal leads to duplicate file names.

The "Extract All" button has the same function as selecting all entries and using "Extract Some". Both buttons offer a choice of four extraction procedures.

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| To current project | The files are all copied to the currently selected Braille2000 project folder (the project named at the top of the Braille2000 control panel). If the leading folder name in the attached file list is not that of the current project, a warning message is given. Warning or not, the files are individually copied into the current project folder. The leading folder name is not used. Warning messages are given if the operation overwrites any existing files. |
| To some project | The project selection box appears, listing all Braille2000 projects. If the leading folder name showing in the attached files list is not the name of any Braille2000 project, you are asked if you would like to create such a project, and then the project selection box appears. Whichever project you select, the individual files are copied into that project folder. The leading folder name in the attached files list is not used (other than to suggest the creation of a new project). Warning messages are given if the operation overwrites any existing files. |
| To some folder | The folder selection box appears, listing all drives and folders on the entire computer. This box is identical to the left panel of Windows Explorer and presents the system as a hierarchy. You can select any existing folder or create a new folder. If leading folder names are showing in the attached file list, they are used to copy the files to the target location, also creating the enclosing folder(s) in the process. If no folder names are showing in the attached file list, the files are copied individually into the designated target folder location. Warning messages are given if the operation overwrites any existing files. |
| Save file | This choice is available only when a single file is involved. A SaveAs type of dialog box appears. You can adjust "Save in:" to change the location of the file and you can adjust the Filename. |

The extract operation is a copy-type operation, meaning that you can extract the same file more than once. The original file (which is part of the B-Mail message) is not destroyed by extraction.

Memberships

A "Membership" is a broadcast service of B-Mail. A B-Mail user may create a Membership, which appears like a virtual person to whom you can send mail. Memberships show in the address book in the category "Public Memberships". Initially a Membership broadcasts messages only to its creating member. Other B-Mail users may join the Membership and will then receive a copy of each message sent to the membership. You cannot enroll others into a membership, each user must join them themselves.

To join a membership, display the address book and select the category Public Memberships. Click on the membership you wish to join and click the Add Entry button. Then click the Join button.

You send B-Mail to a membership just like you send it to a person or organization: using the address book, put the membership name in the "To" box of the outgoing message.

To leave a membership, i.e., to stop receiving copies of messages sent to the group, you use the address book and look at the category called "My Memberships". This category shows only the memberships of which you are a member. Click the entry for a membership you want to leave and then click the Delete Entry button.

Some memberships are open to all. They are unsupervised (unproctored). Other memberships are restricted by their creator who acts as proctor. Unproctored, open memberships have no passwords. Proctored memberships have a password. The restricted memberships are used to broadcast announcements to members of an organization, without going to outsiders.

Any B-Mail user can create a membership. This is done through the address book, by selecting the category Public Memberships, and clicking the Add Entry button. For a new membership, click the "Create a new group" button and type in the name you want for your group. The name should be descriptive. If you want the membership to be open and unproctored, leave the password box empty. If you want the memberships to be restricted and proctored, invent a password and put it in the password box. You, as the creator, become the proctor.

If you create a proctored membership, you will have to give the password to your colleagues who should be members, because the password you defined is needed by all who want to join. As proctor, you are permitted to view a list of the membership. You do this again through the address book, set for Public Memberships, and by clicking Add Entry. Type in the password and then click List Membership. Through the membership listing, you can, if need be, expel members who should not be there.

Membership listings are provided only to proctors. For open public memberships there is no proctor and the membership is private to all, i.e., no one can see who belongs or does not belong to open memberships. Computer Application Specialties Company does not manage memberships. They exist as a self-managed utility for the benefit of all.

Configuration

By a right-button click to the "Check Mail" button, or via Adjust and Mail, you can so the B-Mail™ Properties window. Through this window you can activate automatic checks for new mail and can reregister with the server, for example if your personal data changes and you want to update it or update which elements are public.

Security

The B-Mail™ system is more secure than public e-mail and it is also more efficient in moving data around, but it does not encompass any techniques for high security or high reliability. You should not rely on the B-Mail system for any critical data transfer tasks, i.e., not those that should they be imperfect, cannot be redone. It is possible, though unlikely, for messages to be lost and for message content to be divulged to other parties.

B-Mail message transmissions are encoded within Braille2000 such that they are meaningless to the casual observer or Internet hacker. No message text is readable by any person or process along the transmission path, unless such person or process is going to great lengths to decode the message (which though not impossible to decode is difficult, given that the encoding is proprietary and not of any known standard technique). The security is not absolute but should be adequate, for example, to permit the safe transmission of credit card data.

Note that the B-Mail system is totally immune to viruses and worms and other external threats. Because the B-Mail system is totally self-contained, it is sealed from such attack. However if you receive file attachments of certain kinds (executable programs and scripts), those files may carry viruses or worms or other harmful byproducts that preexisted when they were sent to you via B-Mail. Fortunately braille files (all standard types) cannot carry viruses or worms, and if you limit your file exchanges to braille files, you are safe. Rich Text Files, when processed only by Braille2000 are also safe. Rich Text Files, when processed by WORD may be some risk, but no more because of B-Mail than by any other manner of use.

You must be the final judge as to what information you will transmit. Computer Application Specialties Company warns you that security and reliability is not absolute. By using the B-Mail™ you are accepting all responsibility for its use and agree that the Company will not be liable for any failures in security, disclosure to others, failures to deliver messages and/or file data through the B-Mail™ system, and any and all consequences of your use of the B-Mail™ system. The details of our Terms and Conditions for using B-Mail are presented on-screen when you register with the system. The above remarks are general and are not the official Terms and Conditions for use.