



What is FTP and how do I use it?

by Rob Ierubino (M Prime Systems) © 2005 M Prime Systems

If you've ever uploaded photos from your computer to a company that prints them, you have most likely used File Transfer Protocol (FTP). FTP is a way to transfer files from one computer to another across a network. More specifically by today's standards, that network is the Internet.

This protocol typically defines these two computers as "client" and "host" or "server." Regardless of the type of computer you may be running, the computer that you occupy is the client. The computer to which you connect is the server. Not all servers support FTP. Without the proper software running on the server, you would not be able to connect to it. So, assume that the appropriate FTP server software is running if your support staff has given you the information to connect. If you have trouble connecting, contact the people supporting the server.

There are three pieces of information that are required to connect to the FTP server. They are:

- Server URL or IP address
- Username
- Password

Some FTP sites will allow you to connect anonymously. That is, without a username and password registered on that server. To connect to a server with anonymous privileges, it is proper etiquette to use your email address in the username field and no password, although any information in these fields is permissible.

There are several different FTP clients, or software applications, available for personal use. These applications often provide a free trial period via download. After the trial period has expired (typically 30 days), the software will be disabled until you purchase a valid license. You should consider purchasing an FTP client if you will be using FTP on a routine basis - it will make the process of uploading

and downloading significantly smoother. Here are a few recommended applications:

- CuteFTP (www.cuteftp.com)
- WS_FTP (www.ipswitch.com)
- SmartFTP (www.smartftp.com)

If, however, you do not plan on using FTP on a routine basis, then Microsoft's web browser, Internet Explorer, is a sufficient substitute. To activate IE's FTP capabilities, please perform the following actions:

1. Launch Internet Explorer.
2. From the *Tools* menu, select *Internet Options*.
3. Click on the *Advanced* tab.
4. Under Browsing, check *Enable folder view for FTP sites*.
5. Click the *OK* button.

Now that Internet Explorer is properly setup, enter the provided URL (or IP address) for the FTP server in the IE's address bar in the following format: *ftp://* followed by the URL or IP address. So, if the server's URL is *ftp.testsite.com* (or, the IP address is 127.0.0.1) then enter as follows:

ftp://ftp.testsite.com
or
ftp://127.0.0.1

Upon a connection being established with the FTP server, you will be prompted for your username and password. Enter them here and press the *Log On* button. You are now logged on to the FTP server! From here, simply use this window, in conjunction with Windows Explorer (open in another window), to drag and drop files (moving files to and from each computer), make folders, delete files, etc.

Happy file sharing!