



WARNING!! This email will take 9 hours to download...

by Rob Ierubino (M Prime Systems) © 2006 M Prime Systems

This subject is near and dear to my heart. I'm on the road a lot, and while many hotels offer affordable, high-speed connections, not every hotel does. If I'm gone for more than a few days, you can bet that I'm going to receive an email that taxes my connectivity and will take *forever* to download. What's the cause? Emails that either have one enormous attachment (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation) or several large attachments (e.g., photos).

This doesn't just happen to folks with dial-up connections. This is so much of an issue that companies will often block emails that exceed a certain size so not to clog their network pipes.

What's the big deal? With email, you don't have a warning that these types of messages are coming your way. They are forced upon us. While it's true that a lot of folks have high-speed Internet connections, a 12-megabyte message will still take several minutes to download on most systems; and time is money. If I leave my email open all night long and something takes 30 minutes to download, do I care? Probably not. But if something is blocking all of my other messages from getting into my mailbox during the business day, I'm going to care. If I'm on the road with a dial-up or cellular connection, I'm going to care a lot.

Know Your Recipients. Sending your photos to friends that have a Yahoo, Hotmail, Gmail, or AOL account? You're probably alright because they use a browser-based email application and, therefore, do not automatically download attachments. Any other type of email account (especially those for professional users) will probably download the message automatically. Therefore, you should understand other options that are at your disposal.

Know what you are sending. Whether you're a professional or personal user – know exactly what you are attaching to your message and how big the file size is. Professional users tend to send PowerPoint presentations, Word Documents, and other design-type files. The primary culprits for personal users are photographs. While compressing the files certainly helps, it does not solve the problem. I'm not about to open up the can of worms to explain how to use your operating systems, but here's the bottom line: if you don't know details about what you are sending, please don't attach anything to an email.

Here's a quick guide to the size of digital photographs. We know that the higher the resolution, the larger the printed

photo we can generate. But how much storage space does a photo take? What resolution is your camera? 4-megapixels? 5? 6? Let's go way back in the time machine to 2004 when most cameras were only 3-megapixels. Each picture taken, on average, was about 1.5 megabytes in size. Remember those old 3.5-inch floppy drives? They were 1.44 megabytes in size. Therefore, not even one picture could fit on one disk. Do the math: send four pictures? 6 megabytes. 8 pictures? 12 megabytes. This is only for a 3-megapixel camera.

Other Options. There are many other options for getting your files into the hands of your co-workers, friends, and family members. Here are three.

First Option: For personal users, use a free photo service.

- Kodak EasyShare Gallery (www.kodakgallery.com)
- York Photo (www.yorkphoto.com)
- Snapfish (www.snapfish.com)

Not only do these companies offer low-cost fees for high-quality prints, they also offer free photo albums that you can share with your friends and family. Upload once; send an email to your friends inviting them to look online. Ahhhh, that's much better. Now I can look at the photos when I want.

Second Option: Also for personal users: use the software that was packaged with your digital camera. There is an email function built into these software applications for a reason. They will shrink the photos to a manageable size prior to emailing them. Shrinking a photo to 640x480 pixels (an easy to view picture size) reduces the file size to below 100 kilobytes. Just don't send 50 photos.

Third Option: For everyone: check out YouSendIt.com. With YouSendIt, you tell the website the file(s) that you want to send. The files are then uploaded to the website. Then, a message is sent (with a note from you) to your recipients with a link to the YouSendIt.com website where the file(s) can be downloaded – at the recipient's convenience. To me, that's ideal.

Final Plea. My goal with this article is to have people understand computers a little bit better. They make our lives more fun and easier. But, when technology moves so fast it's easy to become complacent and incorrectly believe that everything is OK. If you must send an email message with a large attachment, first get the recipients go-ahead before you send it. If you don't: watch out. You just might make someone really upset without even trying.