

Preface to the Second Edition

It might surprise the reader to learn that we, the authors, were both on a mailing list called `sendmail-haters`. Do we really *hate* Sendmail? If we do, why write a book about it? Why a second edition? And, why “Theory and Practice”?

The sublime truth of the matter is that we both enjoy a love/hate relationship with Sendmail. Each of us has, over the years, created and been responsible for electronic mail gateways to networks that varied in size from a few hosts, to multinational corporate Internets. Sendmail, even with all its warts, does its job, does it well, is widely used, and is part of most commercial “Open” systems today. Even more importantly, Sendmail is readily available in source code form—which makes it easier to abuse, rewrite, modify, crib from, merge with, break, and fix than most of its competitors.

We wrote the words to the previous paragraph for the first edition, in 1992. And they are still true—incredibly—10 years later. Equally incredible to us, Sendmail’s papa, Eric Allman, co-founded Sendmail, Inc. in 1997, 15 years *after* the program first shipped. Get used to it. Sendmail will continue to be around and used for a long time to come.

Software which is available in source code form tends to scatter to the winds and mutate according to local custom. Sendmail and its Postmasters have developed different customs and habits in each Internet locality; we (the authors) came to Sendmail from very different angles and were using it in wildly opposing ways by the time we met each other. Today we run the same software and configurations, but the road to where we are now is littered with the corpses of many local customs that could not hold out against stronger and more viable customs that had come to life elsewhere. We like to think that the way we do things today contains only the strongest elements of our separate and very different heritages—that merging our code and our ideas has resulted in a new and stronger breed of Sendmails.

This has also been the case in the Sendmail community at large. Over the years, Sendmail morphed into 2 or 3 different and important versions. The importance of security and anti-spam requirements acted as catalyst for bringing the best of these different versions together.

We, the authors, have also answered a few questions, taught a few seminars, and consulted on the subject of Sendmail configuration. Whether in Usenet newsgroups such as `comp.mail.sendmail` or at DECUS Symposia—all over the world—the question continued to come up: “Is there a book we can read to learn more about Sendmail?” The answer has always been: “No.” We got tired of giving that answer.

Still, after the publication of the first edition of this book—the first, and still the only, tutorial on the subject—and after the publication of the O’Reilly Publishers “Bat Book,”¹ why a second edition? Because people kept asking for it. And because the Internet—and Sendmail—is different than it was in 1992.

Which leaves the question: “Why ‘Theory and Practice’?” We decided that if we were going to write a book about Sendmail, we would have to demystify it in a way that would allow any intrepid soul to understand its depths if she so chose; however, we would also have to provide enough “cookbook recipes” and simplified explanations so that a moderately disinterested Postmaster could make Sendmail do what she wanted it to do, without delving into the source code to find out “how.” Sendmail can be arcane, and because of its monstrous size and complexity, most Postmasters never really feel like they know what’s going on. This book was written so that those who want to know what’s going on can know, and those that don’t want to know can still get Sendmail working and be comfortable that they aren’t doing anything “wrong.” We expect that the reader knows a bit about electronic mail and computer networks, at least from a user’s perspective, and has an interest in learning more—about Sendmail, how it works, and how to manage a mail system.

We have chosen to speak of users and Postmasters using the female generic pronouns “she” and “her.” Neither author is female and neither is a “feminist”; however, we believe that since the overwhelming majority of literature through history has used male generic pronouns, some balance is called for—even if for no other reason than to break up the monotony.

The mail addresses used in the examples, unless otherwise specified, are just that: examples. The reader would be wise not to waste time and network bandwidth in trying them out. In some of the examples, we use addresses in the DEC.COM Internet domain, or otherwise talk about Digital’s² network setup. This reflects the fact that we both worked for Digital Equipment Corporation through most of the preparation of the first edition of this book.

This book will show you how and why Sendmail does what it does and how and why we do what we do. We believe you will be edified. Some parts are certain to make you think hard. Others parts will, we hope, make you smile.³

¹ *sendmail* by Bryan Costales with Eric Allman.

² Digital, once one of the top 3 computer manufacturers in the world, only exists as a shell of its former self in bits and pieces of Compaq.

³ “If a man insisted always on being serious, and never allowed himself a bit of fun and relaxation, he would go mad or become unstable without knowing it.” From *Histories of Herodotus*, Volume II, Chapter 173, c. 420 B.C.

Acknowledgments

Authors are necessary but not sufficient to the creation of any book. Many others helped or were inconvenienced (or both) during the writing of the first edition of this book.

Our greatest debt is to our families for their support and their patience. There were times when we should have been available and we weren't. Thanks, especially, to Victoria and Lisa for filling in the gaps that we left during the time we wrote the first edition, years ago, and even more so while we worked on the second edition. It's not like life has gotten *less* complicated over the years.¹

The first edition had some terrific and ruthless reviewers, and we thank Eric Allman, Peter Churchyard, Jon “maddog” Hall, Allen Leibowitz, Marcus Ranum, Win Treese, Lennart Lövstrand and Tim Guarnieri for their comments and suggestions, which smoothed out (repaved, really) the rough spots. Cynthia Livingston swooped down on our stalled effort and pulled it back from the brink of oblivion; without her, this book would not now (or ever?) be in your hands. For the most part, we copy-edited the second edition ourselves, so any mistakes that have crept in are our fault and ours alone.²

Thanks to Lennart Lövstrand for the title of the book, which we cribbed from his original IDA Sendmail paper with his permission. And, of course, additional thanks to Eric Allman. If he hadn't written Sendmail, this book would have been much thinner.

Paul Vixie <vix@al.org>
Fred Avolio <fma@al.org>
<http://smtap.al.org/>

2001

¹ Since the first edition, the Vixies and the Avolios have added 3 children each to their families.

² After-publication errors will be posted at <http://smtap.al.org/errata/>.