

Creating Signatures In Outlook Express.

When we print the hardcopy of a letter created on our word processor, we invariably hand sign it with our customary signature to indicate to the recipient – who hopefully recognises our hand written scrawl - that the letter is from a genuine source.

Many enthusiasts do a scan of their signature and, using the auto correct facility of MS Word, insert the signature into the document with a keystroke – thus overcoming the laborious tedium of having to find a biro and revert to a manual process in this Hi Tech age.

The phenomenon of emailing has created great opportunities for senders to bombard recipients with information which may be eagerly awaited, or selected and deleted before it sees the light of day.

This is because recipients are finding it increasingly difficult to separate the necessary and awaited material from unwanted spam, junk mail, or for matters deemed to be uninteresting and therefore dragged into a pending folder.

The default stationery for Outlook Express is a blank sheet – and it rests with the sender to make it interesting and informative and worthy of opening to the recipient. This tutorial addresses the option, that consideration of the material comprising the signature at the completion of the email can be an important component in the Sender Recipient relationship.

Most “Power-Users” of Outlook Express utilise the program’s facility to create and store several different *text signatures* for use with respectively different recipients and at the completion of the email the sender selects the appropriate signature – e.g. for customers, friends, family members, general enquiries, etc.

This overcomes the nuisance – and often inaccurate - task of repeatedly typing email addresses, telephone numbers, street addresses etc under the sender’s name.

To Create a Simple Text Signature:

1. Open Outlook Express and navigate to Tools>Options>Signatures
2. Click on the New Button
3. Under Edit Signature ensure Text is checked
4. Enter the signature text in the box. (This could be a line each for Name, address, telephone number, email address, or even a Thought for the day or Company slogan etc.).
5. Tick the box entitled Add signatures to all outgoing messages
6. Give the Signature a name by selecting Signature#, which appeared immediately the New button was clicked, Clicking the Rename button, and typing an appropriate name in its place (It may even be appropriate to have one signature labelled - and left – Blank. In this instance place one movement of the space bar in the Text box under Edit Signature).
7. Click OK and it's done.
8. Repeat this procedure for each different signature you would like to have available for your use.
9. Select which of the signatures you want as your default

You may check that the process has worked by clicking on the Write Message icon to create an email. The message window will open displaying the text signature selected as the Default Signature.

Should you decide that you would like to use one of the other signatures you may have created, select and delete the signature which has just appeared and click on Insert>Signatures and select from the resultant scroll down list.

Advice Notes

- Recipients appreciate data which will enable them to speedily contact the sender either via the internet, phone, or Postal Mail. Having this information at the end of your email as part of the signature is the ideal placement for a prompt response. (Don't assume that because your email address may be found in the header of the message, that it WILL be found).
- The Signature placement presents ideal opportunity for presentation of a marketing message, personal slogan, Heraldic motto etc, but overdoing it can be seen as inappropriate or gratuitous – depending on the recipient.
- Placing witty thoughts for the day may be entertaining, but they should be changed frequently, as repetition will become annoying to the recipient.
- The general rule for text signatures is to restrict them to about 4 lines and certainly no more than six. Indulge yourself in more than this and you are almost a spammer. Many chat forums will treat you as such and delete the signature accordingly.

Placing a Graphic with the signature file

PART I: Creating the Graphic:

The signature may be further enhanced by placing it as a graphic in the form of a logo, a picture, stylised text, a scanned signature or other graphic combinations. A head and shoulder portrait could be used, provided it is bright or well lit, as it will eventually end up quite small on the email message window.

Use your favourite graphics program (e.g. Irfan view, Microsoft Paint, Photoshop, Corel draw, Microsoft Digital Image etc) to select, crop and compose your image.



Then employ the Insert Text facility of the program to place and configure the text you wish to accompany the graphic.



It is important to reduce the file size as much as possible, preferably to 25kb or less. A typical digital photo file is between 1 and 2Mb in size and if used as-is in emails would take unacceptable time to send and receive.

Reducing size does have an impact on quality, but since the graphic will be small, it doesn't matter too much. This won't necessarily affect the physical size of the image, which will be determined by some simple HTML codes, which will be addressed in Part II.

In Windows XP, data related to signatures, email stationery etc is stored in *C:\Program Files\Common Files\Microsoft Shared\Stationery*, But as drilling back and forward is a bit laborious, I suggest storing your signature related files in the Root Directory.

So

Begin by creating this folder

1. Open Windows Explorer and select Local Disk C:
2. Click on File>New>Folder and rename the resultant New Folder "SigFiles" and click on Enter.

THEN

3. Open your selected image in your preferred picture editing program – MS Paint, Paint.net, Irfan view, Photoshop, Photoshop elements etc. Crop the image to suit, and insert text onto the image as discussed.
4. (Placing the text at this stage is one – and perhaps the easiest - of the several options which may be used)

5. Save the Image as a jpg file (an abbreviation of JPEG or Joint Photographic Expert Group) and if your graphics program permits it – set the jpeg quality factor at the low or small file setting.
6. Give the image a new name (e.g. Sigmoid.jpg) and save it into your newly created SigFiles folder.
7. If you have a scanner and would like to use a graphic of your real signature then write it on a piece of white paper using a black ink pen, and scan it into your graphics editor for saving as a jpg file into the SigFiles folder. Call the file MySig.jpg.

PART II

HTML Coding:

HTML is the acronym for Hypertext Mark-up Language, a form of coding which comprises the hidden instructions used to compose web pages, based on a simple sequence of text commands or 'tags'.

Although this sounds a bit spooky and off-putting, the process is very simple and we will be using just a few basic tags to include the image or graphic prepared in PART I. This can be easily mastered and it then becomes possible to include and format lines of text to accompany the image.

HTML code is written in plain text using basic rules of logic. The key to success is to keep it simple. For this reason we'll use Windows Notepad as the text editor – rather than a Word Processor which could add extra hidden problem causing commands. Open Notepad (Start>Programs>Accessories>Notepad) and type in the following four lines of text exactly as they appear below.

```
<html>
<p align="left">

</html>
```

Note:

- Although a bit laborious, it is recommended that the code be *typed* in, because for some reason cutting and pasting can also result in hidden problem causing code creating havoc with your expected outcome.
- Tags are enclosed by the 'less than'(<) and 'more than'(>) bracket symbols, while other data and instructions are inside double quotes.
- The first and last tags, i.e. <html> and </html>, denote the beginning and end of a sequence of commands.
- The second line <p align="left"> aligns the graphic on the left side of the page.
- The next tag has three commands; 'img src=' shows the name of the image file and where it is stored on the PC. (So if you are not using the same folder and file name as in this example, you should change line three accordingly).
- Two commands follow; 'width=' and 'height='. These determine the dimensions of the image in pixels.

Having typed the text into Notepad and double checked its accuracy the file is now saved into the SigFiles folder by selecting 'Save As' from the File menu and in the 'Save In' box, browse to the SigFiles folder and in the File Name box type Sigpic.html.

(I like to give my html file the same name as the graphic it is designed to launch – in this case Sigpic.html will be launching Sigpic.jpg).

It is of the utmost importance that the html extension is typed in as it designates Sigpic as an html file.

- **PART III**
- **Enter html Code into Outlook Express**

Now you are ready to set up the signature in Outlook Express

1. Open Outlook Express and go to Tools>Options>Signatures
2. Click on the New button and note that Signature # appears in the Signatures box
3. Under Edit Signature, select File, click the Browse button and navigate to the SigFiles folder.
4. In the Files of Type drop down menu select html files and Sigpic.html should appear in the window above.
5. Select Sigpic.html and click the Open button. It should now appear in the File Box.
6. At the top, under Signature Settings, tick the box Add signatures to all outgoing messages.
7. Click Apply and then OK.

Configuring the Graphic:

Now click on the Write Message icon on the Outlook Express Toolbar and a new blank message window will open – hopefully displaying your signature graphic. If it doesn't appear, go to the Format menu and ensure Rich Text (HTML) is selected, close the Window and try again.

It is quite possible that the image may be misshapen – being too large or small in one of the dimensions entered in the coding. In this case go to the SigFile folder and open Sigpic.html by right clicking on it and selecting Open with from the context menu and then selecting Notepad. Alter the height or width values in line three of the file, save the file and try again. It usually takes two or three shots to get a perfect result.

And there you have it. You can create several different signatures for different occasions or recipients.

Give each jpg file an individual identifying name and prepare its html code file incorporating that name (in place of Sigpic.jpg) into its corresponding html file. Save them all into the SigFiles Folder, Load them into Outlook Express as described in PART III above.

PART IV

Masterclass:

Once you have the process working to your satisfaction you may wish to explore the option of Inserting your text lines using html commands rather than entering them via your graphic program. This permits easier editing and altering of the text accompanying the graphic should such alteration be necessary.

It is particularly suited to text lines beneath a graphic made from a scanned signature as described in PART I Sect 7

Here's how it works;

1. Prepare your graphic without any text.
2. Name the file and save it as a jpg file in the SigFiles folder
3. Prepare and save the html file to launch the file created in 2 above.
4. Enter the html file into Outlook express as described in PART III
5. Configure the graphic as described in PART III
6. Open a new Outlook Express Message page and note the absence of text with your new graphic. Close the message page.
7. Using Notepad open the html file relevant to the graphic and insert the following after the third line

`
 My Name `

(For My Name type in the name you wish to appear with the Graphic

8. Click on File>Save.

This sequence of tags inserts a line break (
) followed by an instruction to make the text bold () then the text that you want to appear (My Name) then the end of the bold text tag ()

The next time an Outlook Express message is opened your graphic should have your name in bold type beneath it.

You can write in any text you like, so try including another line with your phone number and yet another with your email address.

For a final flourish let's end your email and its signature with a line across the page So place the following sequence as the second last line (i.e. the line immediately before </html>)

`<hr>`

Here we have the bold () and end bold () tags with the horizontal reference (<hr>) in between which will insert a bold horizontal line below the line of text.

If you want text in italics, use <i> before the text and </i> at its completion.

Similarly, <u> and </u> may be used to underline text.

To change the size of text, insert the tag <h1> before it (for the largest size) to <h6> for the smallest size – always remembering to insert the end tag (i.e.</h1>) afterwards, otherwise any following text will also be affected.

For more precise control over text size the font size command may be used. This gives 12 increments ranging from +6 to -6. The tag is .

To Centre text on the page, place it between <centre> and </centre> tags.
To Right align the text, modify our former tag (<p align=left>) to <p align=right>.

Not a great deal can go wrong if you have followed the steps so far, but it is very easy to miss a bracket, make a forward slash a backward slash , or forget a quotation mark in the HTML coding, so if it doesn't work – check the coding letter for letter.
If an empty box appears in the email message window instead of your image then check the location of your image file (i.e. C:\Sigfiles) and the name of your image (i.e. Sigpic.jpg) match precisely the path statement in the third line of the coding in the HTML file (i.e. which in our example was Sigpic.html)

This exercise should be enough to get started with html coding, which is a tremendously flexible area to deal with.

Try a few experiments by making signatures to meet a whole series of occasions.
The following sites have hundreds of ideas, divided up into subject matter
www.siglets.com/ and <http://coolsig.com/>

If you wish to learn more about HTML coding there tutorials on the web, including
www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tut/ and www.davesite.com/webstation/html/

Have fun