Walkthrough: Exchange ActiveSync on Your iPhone 2.0

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If MobileMe is Apple's "Exchange for the rest of us", then ActiveSync is Microsoft's "Exchange for the most of them". After Windows and Office, it's arguably the 3rd pillar of Microsoft's business domination. Blackberry's can (and almost de facto do) connect to them; Windows Mobiles certainly connect to them. Even the aging Palm OS Treo's have ActiveSync support. And with the 2.0 software, the iPhone does as well.

Caveat: Microsoft loves them some monopoly power and proprietary solutions (in this case, for example, using their own MAPI rather than the IMAP IDLE standard for "push" email). They may be becoming increasingly open in the face of Web-based competition, but their crown jewels are still closely guarded. So, while Outlook connects directly to Exchange for — according to them — the "richest experience", and Windows Mobile probably follows a close second, iPhone like other ActiveSync licensees connects via something called Outlook Web Access, the same way a web browser might.

How does this experience stack up in richness? Read on to find out!

What is Exchange ActiveSync?

As mentioned above, ActiveSync "pushes" data from a Microsoft Exchange server to your iPhone. This means instead of you having to manually press a button to poll the server and ask for changes, or set up a scheduled polling (i.e. every 5 min., every hour, etc.), as soon as something changes on the server, it automatically sends the update out. So, if you change something in Outlook (client) or via Outlook Web Access (browser), within moments your iPhone will show the exact same changes (and vice versa). This is similar to how Blackberry's work, though rather than every device being handled by a single central Network Operations Center (NOC), devices can connect to any Windows Server running Exchange (typically your business' Exchange Server, or a Hosted Exchange solution).

What Kind of Data Does ActiveSync Push?

Email messages, calendar events, and contact listings.

Setting up ActiveSync

Exchange is a magical yet mysterious beast, typically requiring regular IT supervision and administration. If you're interested in setting up Exchange for the iPhone, Apple provides a PDF overview, as well as utilities to aid in enterprise deployment.

To setup the iPhone for Exchange, start by setting up an email account by tapping Settings, then tapping Mail, Contacts, Calendars, and then add Account…, and choose Microsoft Exchange.

What you do from there will depend on what version of Exchange you're running. Theoretically, if you have Exchange 2007, your iPhone will be able to almost configure itself. If you have an earlier version, like the Exchange 2003 Server I was connecting to, you'll have to enter your Exchange login info (user name, server name, password, etc.)

Using ActiveSync

Due to the problems with Apple's iTunes activation server on launch day, July 11, I left the store with a still bricked iPhone, and while I was able to unbrick it later at home, I couldn't connect to iTunes properly and therefore couldn't sync my data over.

So, while I had a working iPhone 3G, it was a working iPhone 3G with nothing on it, no email, no calendars, no contacts... But a perfect opportunity to try out ActiveSync!

I went through the setup and immediately saw my mail begin to download. I tapped over to calendars and there were my appointments for the day. Contacts? All there.

It's just that simple... which is really the point.

ActiveSync Email (and Spam!)

Email via ActiveSync works the same, with the same options, as any other mail account on the iPhone 3G, the only difference is the "push".

Drawback? "Push" spam. If you get a lot of spam (and due to the nature of what I do, my business address has been scraped for over a decade, and I get tons and tons and tons of spam), you'll immediately discover the annoyance of being buzzed/beeped whenever an "enhancement" or "warez" or "please help get my millions out of Africa" email comes in.

The server-based blacklists, heuristics, etc. filter some, but it's always a balancing act to nuke the garbage while keeping customer or partner messages from getting accidentally nuked along with them. I'm experimenting with filters via Web Access, but so far this is looking like a major problem for me, given that the iPhone doesn't seem to have any client side filtering of its own. Little help, Apple?

ActiveSync Contacts

Contacts enjoy both the standard iPhone 3G contact options — and if you use Exchange 2007 this includes picture support — and also Exchange Directory Search. Don't have someone from the MegaCorp in your local list? Just tap on Groups, Directory, and search away:

ActiveSync Calendars

Like contacts, ActiveSync calendars support all the basic functionality of iPhone 2.0 calendars, with the immediacy of "push" updates (add or delete an event on your iPhone, and it shows up or disappears on your Outlook client or Web access right away), and something else: invitations.

If a co–worker plans a meeting and adds your name to it, you receive an invitation in your Calendar Inbox:

Invitations will display a handy number badge, same as email or SMS, to tell you how many invitations you have. You can choose to accept or decline them. Very sweet.
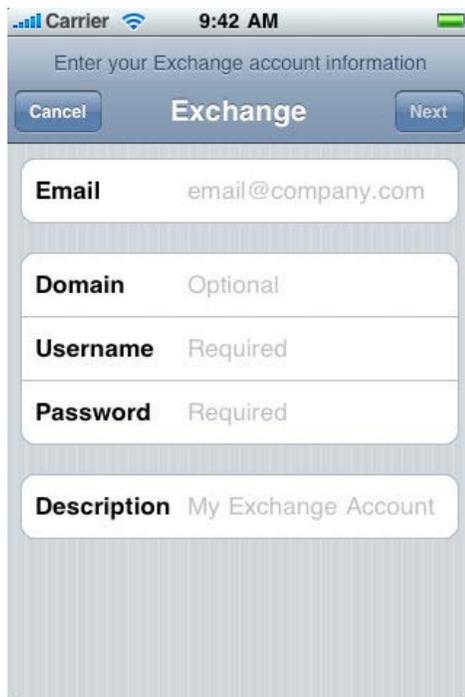
Summary

This article explains how to setup an Exchange ActiveSync account on your iPhone, iPad or iPod touch. Contact your Exchange Server administrator if you are unsure of any of the required information.

Products Affected

iPhone, iPad, iPod touch

Follow these steps to setup your Exchange ActiveSync account your iOS device:

1. Tap **Settings > Mail, Contacts, Calendars** > **Add Account** > **Microsoft Exchange**.
2. Enter the information in the fields below, then hit **Next**:

3. Your iOS device will now try to locate your Exchange Server. If necessary, you will need to enter your front-end Exchange Server's complete address in the **Server** field.

MAKE SURE YOU CHOOSE YOUR SERVER REQUAIRS **SSL**

4.   Choose which content you would like to synchronize: Mail, Contacts, and Calendars. Tap **Save** when finished.

Note: To modify your exchange settings, Tap **Settings > Mail, Contacts, Calendars**, select your Exchange account, and tap **Account Info.**

Additional Information For additional Exchange resources, please visit the iPhone Enterprise Support Page or Exchange ActiveSync and iOS Devices in the Apple Help Library.

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