

Affordable Satellite E-Mail has Finally Arrived

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In 1992 when my wife and I left Houston on our extended Caribbean cruise aboard our Person 39 "Crystal" we were told "Don't buy an SSB Radio. Cheap satellite communication is around the corner and your expensive radio will become obsolete". We did buy that radio and it's a good thing too since it has been a work horse providing reliable communication to the "real" world for over a decade. However, ten years later, affordable e-mail has finally come true through combining the recent rate reductions from Globalstar, Inc., a leading satellite communications provider, with innovative compression software from GMN (Global Marine Networks, LLC).

Unlike SSB based e-mail which requires expensive and difficult to operate equipment, satellite communication is a cinch, very much like checking your e-mail from home. Simply connect your satellite phone to your computer, install e-mail software, dial your ISP and check your mail. It's as easy as 1 2 3. With sat e-mail there are no complex installations, no atmospheric considerations to worry about, no worries about the fellow on the boat next door blasting away trying to establish an SSB Pactor connection to get his e-mail, no waiting in line for some other user to finish his transmission so

that you can attempt to connect, and no frequencies or specific stations to select. Basically there are no hassles and no worries, and now its very affordable as well.

Let's look at the numbers. A Globalstar (www.globalstarusa.com) phone can be purchased via one of the many resellers such as OCENS, Inc. in Seattle WA (www.ocens.com) for \$495. Add the required data cable for \$79 (or alternately a very nice marine kit which includes an external antenna and a phone mount offered by Seatech Systems, Inc. - www.seatech.com), and monthly subscription plan from Globalstar for for as low as \$34.95 and you are ready to go. This plan from Globalstar includes 30 minutes of air time with additional minutes at \$0.99. Globalstar also offers several other plans with air time costs ranging from \$0.99 to \$0.17 per minute.

"Hold on a minute," you say. "It takes 10 minutes to check mail from home using my AOL account. This means that to check mail every day for a month it's going to cost \$302.95 for air time plus a \$19.95 for the AOL fee, and you call this affordable!" Enter left stage XGate by GMN (www.globalmarinenet.net) to save the day!

GMN offers a wireless e-mail software solution that is especially designed for communicating over satellite connections. It includes an e-mail account plus many additional services for a fixed monthly fee of approximately \$20 per month. The software is designed to optimize e-mail communication over any wireless data channel whether it be HF, cellular, or satellite, offering enhanced compression which dramatically speeds up e-mail transactions. Did I mention that the software is fast! On my Globalstar satellite phone I can receive and send on average 15 to 20 e-mails in less than 1 minute. To connect, check for e-mail, and disconnect takes 7 seconds. The bottom line is that by using GMN's software and services it is possible to complete all of your routine e-mail transactions in less than a minute per day using a Globalstar phone. So re-examining the numbers we conclude that after an initial investment of \$574 it is possible to meet all your e-mail needs with a fixed monthly rate of \$34.95 for air time + \$19.95 for GMN services for a total of \$55 per month. And GMN will even send you a short free message to your phone using Globalstar's SMS (short messaging service) informing you of the number of e-mails queued up at the server so that you don't have to waste a phone call to see if you have mail.

Let's contrast these satellite based costs with SSB e-mail prices. A typical marine SSB installation comprising of an ICOM 710 SSB, AT-130 tuner, Pactor modem, back stay insulators, ground plane, and installation costs well over \$3,000.00. Let's assume \$3000 for a typical installation plus a \$200 per year subscription fee for e-mail services. In other words it costs

\$3,200 to do e-mail for the first year using your SSB with a \$200 per year recurring cost. Contrast this with \$1,234 for doing e-mail via satellite for the first year and \$660 per year on going cost. Five year operating cost for SSB e-mail is \$4000 compared to \$3874 to do e-mail via satellite assuming Globalstar does not reduce it's pricing further over the next 5 years!

While making your decision keep in mind that there are several other advantages to having a satellite phone aboard in addition to inexpensive e-mail. Some of these advantages include:

- Easy voice access to land based services in case of an emergency.
- A true Internet connection that can be used to surf the web which allows you to manage your banking from the comfort of your boat. Enhanced, compressed, and fast web browsing is included with the XGate service at no extra costs!
- Hassle free, reliable, and easy access to e-mail.
- Ease of installation.
- Flexibility (For example, you can take your phone when you go hiking or traveling in your RV).

If you haven't purchased your on board e-mail equipment yet, or if you are frustrated with SSB connect times and procedures and desire enhanced wireless data services, you might take a second look at a satellite based solution. Affordable satellite e-mail has finally arrived and with expanding markets and fierce competition prices can only go down.