

There's Got to be an Easier Way

By Lee Inman, KØQED

Have you ever said “There’s got to be an easier way”? Well, there is – at least for sending email when you don’t have access to the internet. It’s called Airmail.

Airmail (www.airmail2000.com) is a Windows program created primarily to connect to the Winlink 2000 Amateur email system (www.winlink.org) over HF. That system provides full email send and receive capabilities using Amateur radio (including the ability to send and receive attachments!). But, what most people don’t know is that Airmail also provides the exact same capabilities when connecting via a VHF Winlink gateway – called a Telpac gateway. We have several in our area:

- KA0WUC-9 in Woodland Park
- KC0PAZ-10 in Colorado Springs
- KB0SRJ-10 in Colorado Springs
- KØQED in SE Black forest
- AIOW-9 SW of Denver

All on 144.930

You can view a real-time status of all active Telpac gateways by going to www.winlink.org/status and then selecting either the Telpac Status or Telpac Map from the menu.

What do you need?

- VHF Radio, antenna, power supply
- TNC (Airmail supports many different TNCs)
- Computer with Windows 98 or later
- Airmail (free from www.airmail2000.com)

Basically that amounts to a working packet station plus Airmail.

Airmail is similar to other email programs – you compose a message then connect to the email server (in this case its Winlink not your ISP or email provider) to send the message. While connected, if there are any pending messages, they are downloaded to Airmail where you can read them after you disconnect. Airmail only stays connected to the Winlink system long enough to send and receive messages – not all the time. Actually, your normal email program does it the same way, you just don’t notice it since you may already be connected to the internet.

Configuring Airmail for VHF operation is probably the most difficult aspect of this after you have your packet station up and operational. Not difficult to do really, just difficult to find *where* to do it.

In Airmail, go to the Tool | Options menu – the Airmail Options dialog should display. Select the Modules tab and then put a check mark next to the VHF Packet Client item. Press the Setup button next to this item to configure the TNC settings. If your TNC isn't listed, use the closest match (KPC-3 for KPC-3+, for example). If you are unsure of the individual settings, the default values should be sufficient to get you on the air. Once done here, close the dialogs using the OK buttons.

Now the fun part – Choose the Modules | Packet Client menu option. If all goes well, you should see a message saying that the TNC was initialized properly. If not, go back and check the TNC configuration settings.

Once the TNC has initialized you can attempt to connect to a Telpac gateway. Fill in the “Connect To” box with the callsign of the Telpac gateway you wish to connect to (KA0WUC-9, for example). Press the green button to initiate an automated connection. You should see the connection progress in the window below the button.

What - nothing happened? Guess you didn't have any mail waiting on the Winlink system. If you haven't used Winlink before, you'll need to send at least one message through the system to create your (free) Winlink email account. Your email address will be your callsign@winlink.org. Compose a message to anyone and then perform another connect session – this time your message will be sent, but you still won't receive anything.

You can have someone send a normal email message to your new Winlink email account or even send one to yourself using your every-day email system. Wait a few minutes, perform another Airmail connect session, and you should receive your test message.

Airmail on VHF along with the Winlink 2000 system gives us an easy way to send and receive industry standard email while in the field. Give it a try.