

5 of the Best Ways to Figure Out Where Email is Hosted

Who is Hosting This Email?

Sometimes, you're handed a domain name and need to figure out where email is being hosted, or you have email, but you don't know where it's being hosted. Maybe you're taking over website maintenance, or your client wants to migrate their email. Whatever the reason, here are a few solid ways to track it down.

Who is My Email Provider?

To find out, you should do a DNS lookup and look at the MX record. The MX record tells you where the email portion of your domain is handled. Do a search on the domain listed there to find out who your email provider is.

Since **the company hosting your website may or may not be hosting your email**, it might be a little confusing to track down who an email host / provider really is. Add to that these numerous spam/junk email cleaning services out there, who temporarily get your email to clean it up and then send it back to you and figuring out who an email host is can be downright confusing.

This article gives some tips and ways to find out where an email address is hosted. I'm giving you the non-geek ways first and then the geek ways. Both get you about the same results so that you know where your domain name's email is hosted.

A Quick Understanding of Email

Before moving on, please make sure you understand a few things (this will help you):

- All your email is at one host – it's not divided up. For example, user1@yourdomain.com and user28@yourdomain.com all use the same hosting company. You cannot have multiple companies hosting your email.
- Email can be web-based or client-based. Web based is like GMail. You use your web browser to view it. Client-based is like using Outlook, Apple Mail or Thunderbird – it's a separate program you start and it's not in your web browser.
- If you use client-based email, you may have different sending and receiving hosts. You may login to one host to check/receive email and another host to send email.
 - Your receiving email host is either using POP3 or IMAP.
 - Your sending email host is using SMTP.
- If you're keeping your email on the server and checking it from multiple locations or devices, then you're probably using the IMAP protocol (incidentally, web-based email works this way, too).

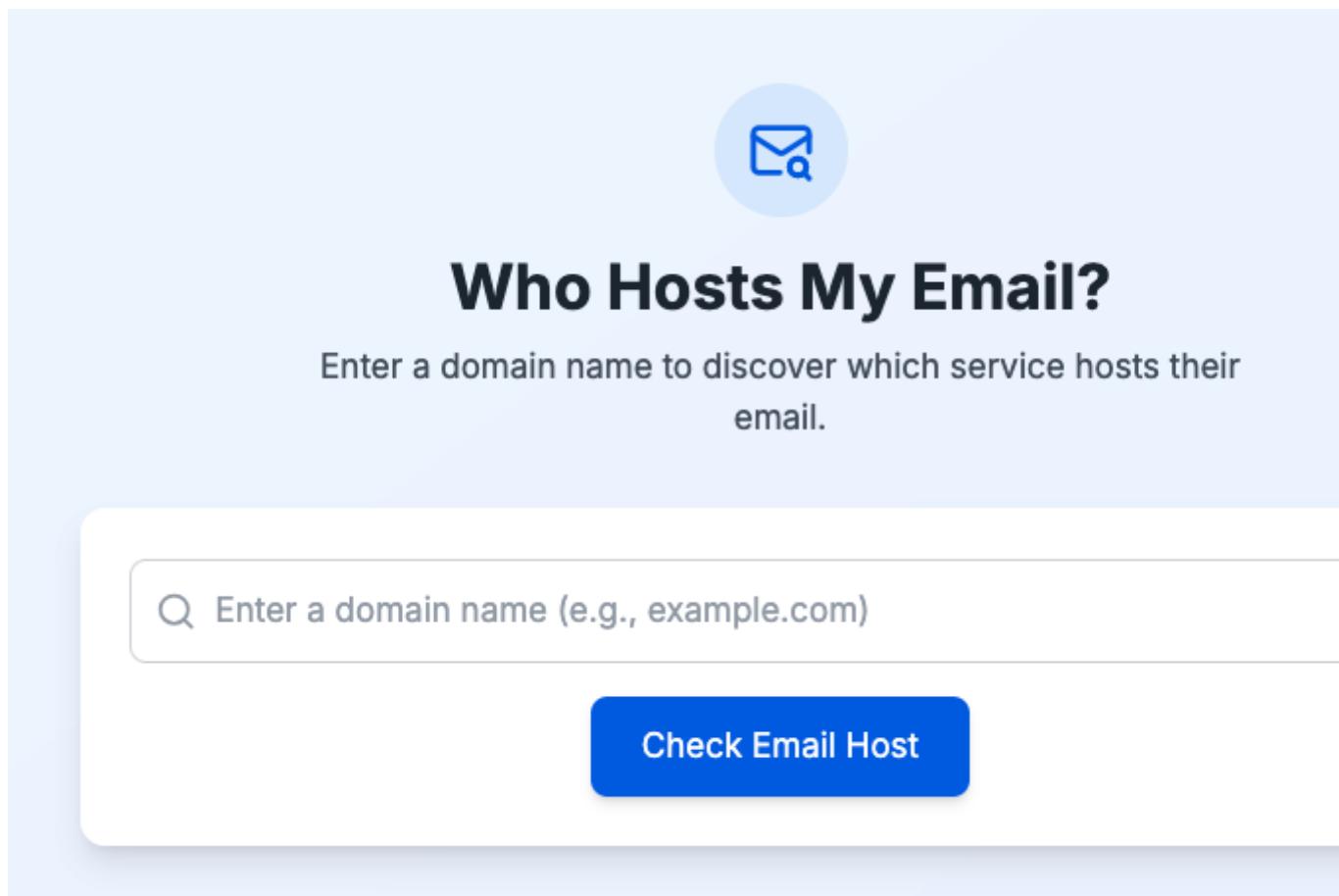
- If you're downloading your email every time you check it and clearing it off the server, then you're using POP3 as the protocol (or "way") you're using email.
- Email can also be forwarding from one place to another, so make sure you're checking for things like that.

Email can be a little tricky but there is a path you can follow and get answers, so don't give up!

The 5 ways are below... scroll on!

1. Go to: Who Hosts My Email?

I built a little tool to try to help you. It's over at WhoHostsMyEmail.com – give it a try:



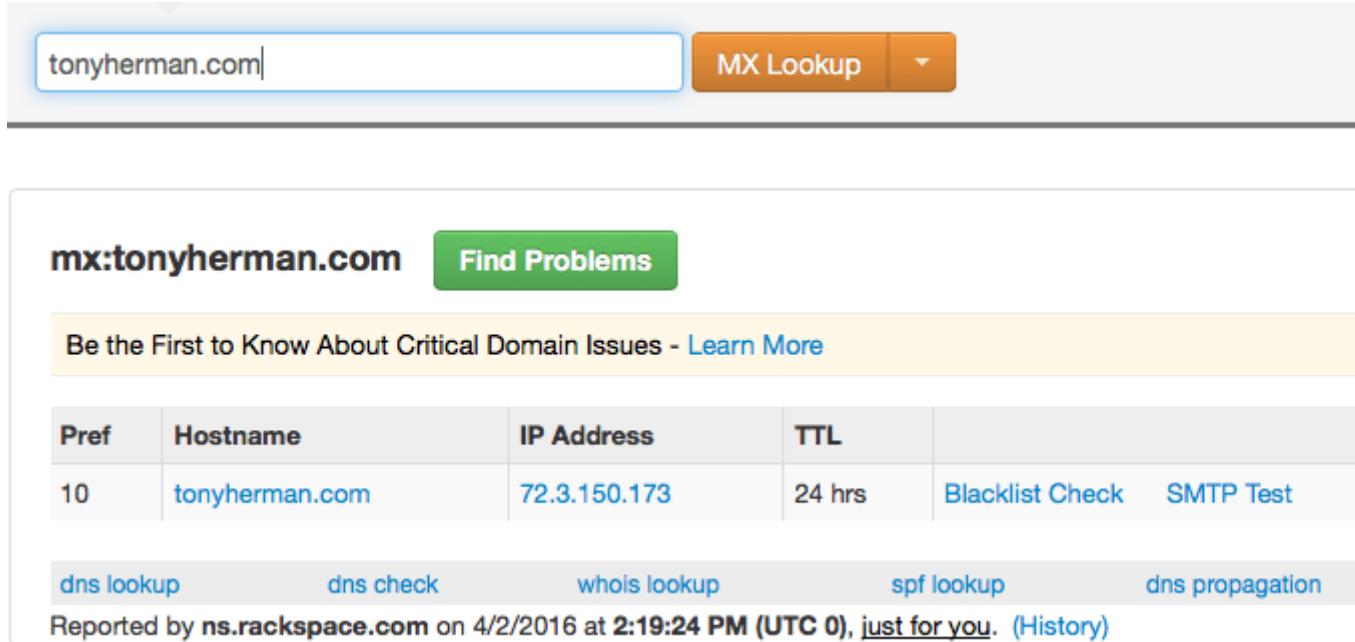
2. Use MX Lookup to Find Out Who is Hosting Your Email / Server

The fastest way to get a peek at a domain's email setup is by using MXToolbox.

1. Go to the MXToolbox homepage.
2. Type in the domain (like "example.com") and choose the "MX Lookup" option.
3. Click the search button.

This will show you the domain's MX (Mail Exchange) records. Usually, the provider's name is right in the hostname—e.g., Google, Microsoft, Zoho, etc.

Pro tip: If you see something like aspmx.l.google.com, then the domain is using Google Workspace (Gmail).

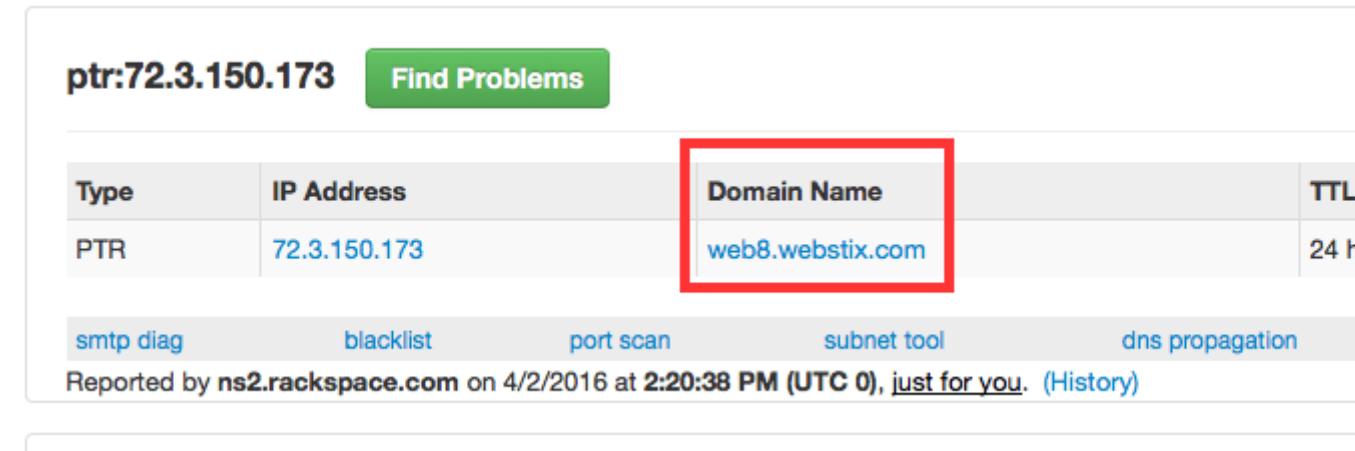


The screenshot shows the MXToolbox interface. In the search bar, 'tonyherman.com' is entered. Below the search bar is an orange 'MX Lookup' button with a dropdown arrow. The results page has a header 'mx:tonyherman.com' and a 'Find Problems' button. A yellow banner at the top says 'Be the First to Know About Critical Domain Issues - [Learn More](#)'. The main table shows the following data:

Pref	Hostname	IP Address	TTL	Blacklist Check	SMTP Test
10	tonyherman.com	72.3.150.173	24 hrs	Blacklist Check	SMTP Test

Below the table are several links: 'dns lookup', 'dns check', 'whois lookup', 'spf lookup', and 'dns propagation'. A note at the bottom says 'Reported by ns.rackspace.com on 4/2/2016 at 2:19:24 PM (UTC 0), [just for you.](#) ([History](#))'.

You'll see who the host is. Click on the IP address for more information and you should see the host and this will help you determine your email host:



The screenshot shows the NSLookupTool interface. In the search bar, 'ptr:72.3.150.173' is entered. Below the search bar is a green 'Find Problems' button. The results page has a header 'ptr:72.3.150.173' and a 'Find Problems' button. The main table shows the following data:

Type	IP Address	Domain Name	TTL
PTR	72.3.150.173	web8.webstix.com	24 hr

Below the table are several links: 'smtp diag', 'blacklist', 'port scan', 'subnet tool', and 'dns propagation'. A note at the bottom says 'Reported by ns2.rackspace.com on 4/2/2016 at 2:20:38 PM (UTC 0), [just for you.](#) ([History](#))'.

2. Check the Domain's DNS Settings

If you have access to the domain's DNS (via the registrar or hosting provider), you can log in and view the MX records directly. This tells you exactly where emails are being routed.

MX records usually contain a hostname, and that hostname typically gives away the provider. If you're not sure what the host is from the MX record, just do a quick Google search for that hostname.

Start with the domain. Do a "whois" to find out which name servers (DNS) are being used with this domain.

You will see this in the results:

Copy

```
Name Server: NS.RACKSPACE.COM  
Name Server: NS2.RACKSPACE.COM
```

There are 2 or more name servers listed usually as there is a primary server and secondary server. Very often, where you have your DNS is where you have other things like your website hosting and email, so **this is a valuable clue**.

I also have an article here about how to tell who is hosting your website and you might want to read that one as well.

Next, check the MX record, which says where email goes. If you have a Linux shell available (or the Terminal app on a Mac), run this command:

```
dig tonyherman.com mx
```

On Windows:

Copy

```
nslookup -type=mx tonyherman.com
```

These will return the domain's MX records just like MXToolbox. Again, look at the hostname for clues. Here's what it might look like:

Copy

```
TonyMacbookPro:~ tony$ dig tonyherman.com mx  
  
; <>> DiG 9.8.3-P1 <>> tonyherman.com mx  
;; global options: +cmd  
;; Got answer:  
;; ->>HEADER<<- opcode: QUERY, status: NOERROR, id: 39325  
;; flags: qr rd ra; QUERY: 1, ANSWER: 1, AUTHORITY: 0, ADDITIONAL: 0  
  
;; QUESTION SECTION:  
;tonyherman.com.           IN      MX
```

```
; ; ANSWER SECTION:  
tonyherman.com. 86400 IN MX 10 tonyherman.com.  
  
; ; Query time: 50 msec  
; ; SERVER: 10.0.1.1#53(10.0.1.1)  
; ; WHEN: Fri Apr 1 20:13:47 2016  
; ; MSG SIZE rcvd: 48
```

In this case, email is handled by the server that hosts the tonyherman.com domain name. This would mean it's the same as the website host.

See if that matches where the website is hosted – to find that out, just run this command:

```
dig tonyherman.com
```

(In all these examples, don't use "tonyherman.com" but use your domain name, of course)

If these two match up, then your email is hosted in the same server as your website, like I explained.

3. Try Misk.com's Lookup Tool

4.

Misk.com offers a nice little email hosting discovery tool. Just enter the domain and it will pull MX record info for you.

It's a clean, fast option when you want a second opinion or an alternative to MXToolbox.

4. If All Else Fails: Talk to Your Website Host



If you still don't know who is hosting your email for your domain name or if you can't do what's listed above, talk to your website host. They should know or be able to help you figure out where the email portion of your domain name is being sent to.

It might be them or it might be at another place (company) but they should be able to tell you.

The email host for a domain name can be on a different server than your website server (email and web can be different servers). Sometimes hosting companies have to move things around to make them work better, so this happens from time to time.

If you're not sure who your website host is or server is, there are a few ways to find out:

- Check your credit card or bank statements – who are you paying?
- Check with your website design company – they might know.
- Check with your IT support department – they should know.

Be creative and do some digging. The answers are out there. Don't give up but just figure the problem out.

Bonus: What If It's Not Obvious?

Sometimes, the MX record points to a filtering service like Proofpoint, Mimecast, or Barracuda—not the actual mailbox provider. In that case:

- Look for a secondary MX record with a more recognizable hostname.
- Check SPF records in the DNS zone. These often contain the real provider's domain.
- Ask the client to check their email login URL—this can give away the host.

Conclusion

These methods will help you figure out where a domain's email is being hosted 95% of the time. It's often as simple as checking the MX record and Googling the hostname.

If you have problems with email, then contact your email host and see how they can help you and tell you who is hosting your email server.

If you need help with your SMTP server, then [here's a good article about that](#).

? And then also read my article, [“How to Check Where Your Domain is Being Handled”](#) to find out more about this topic.

If you have any more tips about how to find where email accounts are being hosted, please leave them below and please share this article.

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