

Voxmail

- [Introduction](#)
- [Getting Started](#)
- [Using Voxmail](#)
- [Super Duper Deluxe Bonus Features](#)
- [The Future](#)
- [Download](#)

Introduction

Hello, internet stranger.

Thanks very much for testing Voxmail.

Voxmail is an iOS email client that doesn't have a UI - it's designed to let you check your email and perform basic tasks directly from Siri.

Background

I have a daily status meeting for work every morning at 9am. But with my kids' school schedule, I'm not able to get into the office early enough to do a quick email check before the meeting starts, which leaves me unprepared.

Siri on iOS has decent support for email. However, when driving, hands-free CarPlay basically does nothing. (Yes, that's likely a safety restriction put in place by Apple for very good reason.)

Voxmail lets me listen to my morning emails on the way to work. I can also archive, delete, mark as spam, etc. using just my voice. I find it super helpful. I hope you do, too.

Getting Started

Adding Email Accounts

You'll need to add your email accounts to Voxmail. Unlike your calendars and reminders on iOS, the system does not allow 3rd party access to the email you've already setup in Mail.app.

To add an email account you'll need:

1. Email username (usually, but not always your email address)
2. Password
3. Incoming mail server (IMAP)
4. Outgoing mail server (SMTP)

For now, Voxmail will only work with IMAP email. POP3, Google Apps (using the Gmail API), and Exchange is not supported. That said, Gmail allows IMAP access if you turn it on in your Gmail settings on the web. And most Exchange servers have IMAP enabled as well.

Depending on your email provider, if you have two-factor authentication turned on, you'll need to create an "app-specific password" to use just with Voxmail. (A unique password just for the app that is not the same as your "real" password.) This likely applies to Gmail, Apple (@mac.com, @me.com, @icloud.com), and Fastmail accounts, as those providers heavily push users towards using 2FA by default. (A good thing!)

Voxmail will automatically fill-in the appropriate email servers for you if it can tell which email provider you're using. (Ex: gmail.com, hotmail.com, icloud.com, etc.) If you're using a custom domain name, however, all bets are off and you'll need to lookup your server names or ask your IT department. (There are ways for Voxmail to detect this information, but that is not implemented yet.)

Choosing Email Folders

After signing into your account, you'll need to tell Voxmail which folders to use for your Inbox, Archive, Sent mail, etc.

Adding Siri Shortcuts

In order for Voxmail to work with Siri, you need to add the app's Siri Shortcuts. These are the phrases you'll speak to Siri that she(?) will listen for to know when to use Voxmail.

Each shortcut has a green + button. Tap the + to add the shortcut to Siri. You'll be given the opportunity to change the phrase to something you prefer if you don't like the default that I've picked.

Once the shortcuts have been added (you don't have to add all of them if you don't want to), you can ask Siri one of those specific phrases.

Please note: 3rd party apps that use Siri are fairly constrained. You need to speak to Siri the *exact phrase* you added the shortcut with.

Using Voxmail

Here's an example of how you might use Voxmail when talking with Siri (assuming you are using the default phrases Voxmail suggests in the step above):

“ Hey, Siri. Check my email.

And Siri will check your email and give you a summary of your inboxes.

You can also ask specifically for unread email:

“ Hey, Siri. Check my unread email.

From that point forward, you can use Voxmail to read your emails to you and triage them, one after another, much like voicemail from the early 2000s.

What I mean is, Voxmail keeps track of your "current" email - the one you're reading or doing something with. You can say:

“ Hey, Siri. Read that email.

and Voxmail will read it to you. You could then follow it up with?

“ Hey, Siri. Flag that email.

or

Hey, Siri. Archive that email.

or even

“ Hey, Siri. Mark that email as spam.

and Voxmail will do the right thing and then move to your next email.

If you want to skip an email and save it for later, just say

“ Hey, Siri. Next email.

and Voxmail will move on to the next message.

As you're processing your Inbox, try not to feel rushed. Voxmail remembers where you are and is happy to sit there and wait until you give it another command with Siri. So don't feel like you have to "keep the conversation going". It won't lose your place.

And at any point you can ask Voxmail to check your accounts for new email again and start over at the top of your Inbox.

Super Duper Deluxe Bonus Features

Reminders

Ever want to save an email for later or make a todo out of a message? Well, Voxmail has a top-secret phrase you can speak to Siri to do just that.

“ Hey, Siri. Using Voxmail, remind me about that email at 9am tomorrow.

Say that, and Voxmail will create a new todo in the iOS Reminders.app about your current email and set an alarm for 9am the next day.

Feel free to assign a date/time in any format that Siri would normally understand: "...next week", or "...in an hour", or "...Wednesday at 4:30pm".

You can also do super special awesome things like:

“ Hey, Siri. Using Voxmail, remind me about that email when I arrive at work.

Note: Siri is really, super picky when it comes to what you can and cannot say to 3rd party apps. If you just say "Remind me about that email", Siri will default to using the system Reminders.app instead of Voxmail. So, that's why you explicitly have to say "Using Voxmail. remind me...".

New Email Notifications in CarPlay

and with AirPods

CarPlay is easily one of my favorite things Apple has ever built. But one thing that drives me crazy is that when your phone is connected to CarPlay, Apple silences all notifications unless they're from an approved app such as Phone, Messages, Calendar, Reminders, and driving directions.

And, look, that's for good reason. I don't want other drivers reading Twitter going down the interstate. But I do think there is a happy medium possible for other messaging apps with a voice interface.

So, in Voxmail's settings, you can add your cell phone number and when the app detects a new email, it will ping my web server with the details and send you a text message.

Why do that?

Well, the SMS will come through to CarPlay and Siri will happily announce "Voxmail says, you have a new Gmail email from Tim Cook titled 'We think you're going to love it'". It's then up to you if you want to ask Siri to read the new email to you, delete it, etc.

Or, if you're exercising with your AirPods in, Siri will automatically announce new text messages to you. Again, giving you the opportunity to triage important emails as they arrive.

The Future

I have some more (to me at least) interesting ideas around how a purely voice interface to your email might work. It's an area of technology that fascinates me.

But, more importantly, I'd love to hear your thoughts about Voxmail. Is it even useful in this very early stage? Does the voice UX make sense? Missing features? Bugs and/or ideas to make the app easier to use?

Any and all feedback is very much welcome.

Cheers.

Tyler

Download

You can join the [Voxmail public TestFlight here](#).