

By February 2008 Editor, Software Reviews

[New BatMail For You](#)

Professional bats retrieve your mail

Email clients are generally free solutions designed for easy management of your POP3 email accounts. If you asked me, they are an important component of the suite of installed software on a computer, although many users can live perfectly well using a webmail service. The solutions available right now are pretty good, even in the freebie sector, with Thunderbird or DreamMail doing a wonderful job. But, if you really want to feel the power of a stable, highly configurable email client that knows your needs exactly, take a look at the latest version of RITLabs' The Bat!. You have 30 days of trial and the home version comes at a \$35 price while the professional one has \$45 written all over the price tag. I know the prices may discourage you, but the product brings a set of features unequalled by any of its competitors. The Bat! came to a new version recently and, although there are no major changes to its core, most of the improvements are visible as they are linked to the visual part of the application. But you will also feel the changes as they make the software move faster when it comes to message list sorting by a specific criteria and the memory usage is has been significantly improved by fixing various memory leaks (in stand by it now takes a little over 5MB and even when connecting to the server the change is barely noticeable). So, The Bat! comes all spruced up and ready to assist you into managing tons of emails (I really mean this) easily and in the most organized manner, always providing the security of a backup which ensures that no message strays from your view. I would talk about the Home edition of the application but given we're all experts when it comes to email, I say the Professional version makes available all the features we need in order to be 100% in control. First of all, you should know that the differences between Home and Pro editions of the software are not too steep with the mention that Pro edition is a bit heftier due to its incorporation of spell checker dictionaries, support for hardware authentication with mail servers, on the fly message encryption and biometric authentication with BatPost Server through Dekart BIO API. Basically Home edition does not suit for as strong a protection of your messages as Professional version. Installing the application works like a charm and ends with setting up the application for your daily usage. And the first thing to configure is **data protection** for your messages. Activating this option ensures that no information is stored on your disk in plain text form and everything is **encrypted on the fly**. The data can be protected by using a simple password which is required each time you start The Bat! or through physical USB devices like Aladdin eToken USB or Rainbow iKey1000 USB key. The downside is that, if you reached this point, you have to decide on the spot as you can revert your decision only with a new installation of the software. Setting up the application continues with defining a safe location for storing all your emails. The options include several default locations (current user's Application Data, all PC users Application Data folder) and also allow you to define a directory of your choice anywhere on the disk. Next in the line of configuring The Bat! is setting up the account which is not too different from any other email client. The application works with the now standard **POP3** protocol, **IMAP4** and **MAPI** email protocols which is basically all you need. With your first account set up and ready to go, the software provides you a chance to more configuration options, account specific ones, allowing customization of the way the messages on the server are treated once they are retrieved in The Bat!, periodical check, setting up templates to help you to easier writing the messages, etc. Although all these choices may be overwhelming and it is going to take a while to get used to all of them, the program is comfortable enough to be handled by any type of user. At a first glance, The Bat! may seem to be a regular email client which has freeware correspondents all over the Internet and can be easily substituted by any of them, but wait till you see what's under the hood. There are so many options, features and possibilities in The Bat! that it is going to take you some time to check their location. As for learning how to use them, let's just say that it takes longer to find them than to learn their purpose. Support for multiple accounts has become such a standard that it is not even worth mentioning, as every email client can work with more than one email account. In The Bat! however, you can protect each account with a **user-defined password** in order to restrict unauthorized access; more than this, you can create user accounts with restricted access to certain email accounts (this works just like the computer accounts on Windows operating system with differences between the administrators and users).

But, apparently, there is one little glitch in this sense, as the evaluation version does not contain "Set Access Password" option in the context menu of an account, while a registered copy of the application (the same version was used) showed this with no problems. This actually means that, if you like the evaluation edition of the software, once you register the copy you will actually benefit from many more options. Besides the regular folders available for each email account, you can create additional ones for better management of the messages. And, with **Sorting Office** options, you can automatically move messages from one folder to another or define a myriad of other actions (print, export, extract attachment, delete, capture address, reply, forward, redirect, etc.) the moment they are intercepted by The Bat!. This feature is particularly important as it allows you to manage emails with user defined particularities (larger than a certain size, coming from a specific user, etc.). Getting used to Sorting Office does not take long at all as every rule is created based on predefined conditions which are extremely flexible and all pervasive. **Parking a message** is an additional measure to prevent you from accidentally deleting a valuable item. The function will prompt a screen asking if you really want to delete/move the parked message. To tell you the truth, I wish it would simply prevent this kind of action and give the reason for the proceeding, but the way they designed it is good enough, too. To emphasize the importance or un-importance of received items The Bat! offers the user the possibility of color coding each message according to user defined color groups. Thus you can assign to a group name a specific color which denotes importance according to your standards. As any respectable email client, The Bat! brings its own set of tools to get rid of all the **spam** your inbox is bombarded with. By default there is no protection, but, taking a trip to developers website and checking Plugins section will definitely crack a smile upon your face as you can download several anti-spam plugins specially designed to work with The Bat!. You've heard a lot about the self-teaching Bayesian filter and AntiSpam Sniper is a valiant fighter and accurate picker of unnecessary messages and, as these will check every message the moment they leave the server, you really have little to worry about. A similar situation goes for anti-virus protection although in this case things are fairly different because there is a narrow palette of anti-virus programs that can work automatically with The Bat!. This actually means you cannot define whatever anti-virus you have installed on your computer to check on incoming emails for nasty critters, but actually use one of the software compatible with the email client. And, although some of the options for this are very good, it would be nice to let the user choose what the best protection for his /her system is. However, if you rely on **NOD32**, I cannot but congratulate you for choosing one of the best antivirus software on the market. The Bat! brings a very useful option (actually RITLabs made it available since earlier versions of the software) which can help you trace the geo location of the server sending you an email. You can actually view the source of the email and detect the address it had been sent from and, if you are lucky, the name of the computer used to send the message or the email client employed. **Maintenance Centre** helps you keep all mail folders clean and without duplicates, as well as purge and compress all messages leaving your inbox squeaky clean and only with valid messages. The actions to be performed upon calling this function include checking the integrity and repairing any damaged message, removing duplicates, purging old and exceeding mails as well as remove all deleted messages. The heavy artillery is available under Tools menu as this is where you can manage all your messages by backing them up, schedule certain actions for a later time, synchronize the emails between two The Bat! installed on different machines, export/import messages, restore a backup, handle privacy options, use that uber search function, or call on **Smart Bat**. Regarding the encryption of your messages, it is useless to say that The Bat! offers one of the best encryption methods (OpenPGP relying on both public and private keys for decrypting a message). Depending on the version you have installed on your computer (**PGP command line**, **PGP5.5 plugin**, [GNU Privacy Guard](#), etc.) you can choose it to work with. This is actually what makes The Bat! one of the best email clients on the market. Given the necessary attention, your messages can become fully encrypted and only authorized persons with valid keys can view them. As for the **templates**, the application can easily be configured to automatically insert snippets of text or phrases. And, if you add all the macros that can be downloaded from RITLabs website, you are really in for a treat. Nevertheless, you should be aware that it could take a while to properly configure all the templates you need, but once you do this, everything will be so much easier as The Bat! comes with macros for text, for sender's information, pre-defined fields (Subject, BC, CC, From, Reply To, etc.) recipient info, preview, file attaching, inserting a text file, etc. You have plenty to tinker with in order to create templates to save a lot of time in routine situations. And all you have to do to invoke the list of templates is use the Ctr Space keyboard combination. The **address book** is an important part of an email client and The Bat! raises to its professional

standards from this point of view, as well. With support for multiple address books, the application offers the possibility of grouping your contacts for a better management and a myriad of fields to be filled for the most complete information on a person. However, the impressive feature is the opportunity of combining the data on a contact with quick templates to be used whenever communicating to that person. More than this, you can personalize the message to a specific contact by using a special character set, or employing a different template for forwarding a message, replying to one or simply writing a new one. And, if you have a plethora of contacts, in order not to make any confusion, you can add for each of them their picture or a memo describing that person or the situation you've met. Configuring the application may leave you a bit baffled as the myriad of options, tweaks and adjustments you can make is truly impressive and worthy of a **professional email client**. You can set the client to alert you about birthdays based on the data inserted in the address book for each contact, make it start with Windows in minimized mode, display the mail ticker on top of all windows (or hide it, like I did); and these represent only the light part of the configuration. Going deeper into the application we find that it can be configured to perform **automatic backups** for all the data on a regular basis along with defining the location, define the information to be backed up (account properties, folders with messages, address books, attachment files) and the accounts that should benefit from this "privilege". It seems that anything about a message can be customized in The Bat!, starting with the color groups and fonts, message headers to be displayed for each mail, header layout (colors and fonts) or mail ticker and ending with tabs and date and time, everything can be configured to suit your needs. For the protection of the computer the application can be configured not to open certain files types you get to define or display an additional alert when double extension files are detected. All the extensions that should be automatically denied opening, that can be opened with no previous warning or that the user should be asked before launching can be set under Protection section of the preferences section of the application. And **anti-virus** and **anti-spam** options available are dependent on the plugins installed and the anti-virus software available on your computer. Unfortunately, this is the only way to enable virus checking for incoming email and you have to comply with the anti-virus software supported by The Bat! and available on RITLabs website: **Dr. Web, F-Prot, ClamWin** and **NOD32**. This downside cuts a big chunk of software's flexibility as it does not allow the user the employment of a wider range of anti virus software with The Bat!. With anti-spam, things aren't much different but, as these applications function slightly different than anti-virus software, you have a wider palette of choices, regardless of the plugins offered on RITLabs website. My recommendation in this sense goes with AntiSpam Sniper and the self learning **Bayesian filter**. Besides the fact that these will learn by themselves the options provided by the two plugins are simply amazing as they rely on filters ranging from whitelist and blacklist to blackwords, DNS blacklisting, regular expressions and sender blocking. The Bayesian filter comes free, but for making the most out of AntiSpam Sniper you will have to go with the full version and buy it. Viewing the messages in a certain text viewer may, in some cases, save you a lot of trouble as it blocks the downloading of malware in the background. Although The Bat! alerts you about these activities and permits blocking them easily, you still have the opportunity of choosing the way to view the emails. Thus, you can use a plain text viewer which displays the content very fast and with absolutely no graphics (this reduces the risk of infection) or use an HTML viewer to show you all the bells and whistles in the message. The user benefits from a rich bag of settings for customizing the message editor/viewer by setting character limits for text wrapping, auto saving time or **MicroEd** specific options. Configuring all these is not that important, but takes you closer to personalizing your copy of The Bat!; plus all the settings can be backed up and restored in case something happens. **SmartBat** is a simple editor that provides a comfortable way to store text snippets. It can be called by using F6 shortcut and at each launch it will create a new delimitation consisting in time and date-stamps. It can store as much text as you want with absolutely no problem and, for fast finding of the information you need, it makes available a search function (simply type in the phrase you are looking for and the app will bring it into view). The downside is that SmartBat opens only if The Bat! interface is opened, but you can paste from absolutely any application. Its services are not limited to storing text strings, but extend to providing a Scheduling function that works for the entire email client. It allows for programming different activities to be carried out automatically at a user defined time. The task can be anything from starting a program, sending/checking emails, sending an automatic reply, perform folder maintenance, backing up the data or refiltering the message to checking for an updated version of the software. Mind that you can also define an action to start after the programmed event finishes. When writing a new message, The Bat! comes with a set of options that make all other email clients red with envy. For instance, the message

can be encrypted and signed when completed, you can enable the spell checker (and configure it) or enforce receipt or reading confirmation. The flexibility and ease of use when composing a new message is absolutely amazing, especially if you keep in mind that it's the Professional version of The Bat!. There are plenty of options I have left out right now, but this is just because they are common to almost all email clients I've met and do not raise too much of an interest (they are often taken for granted). **The Good** Even if it is a Professional version, everything is easy to understand and configure even by the uninitiated. It is highly customizable offering the chance of personalizing almost every setting it makes available. Encryption is absolutely fantastic, letting you choose the desired OpenPGP version to be used (plus it offers an internal version of this protection). The support for multi-user and multi-account environment makes it stand out in the crowd. It has a wide list of options for keeping your messages safe and sound, from backup solution to synchronization with a different copy of The Bat! on a different machine. A rich list of mailboxes is supported by the software in order to make the transition from another email client as painless and effortless as possible. It can import messages from Eudora Lite/Pro, Pegasus Mail, Netscape 6, Netscape Mail, MS Outlook Express 5.x/6.x or MS Outlook with absolutely no fuss. The Bat! comes with an impressive variety of templates covering a plethora of presets. Also, automatic sorting options under the form of Sorting Office tool provide a bunch of filters to help you automatically manage each incoming email according to specific criteria. Search function is simply fantastic. It allows looking for a certain something based on text, sender, recipient, subject, header, memo and even attachment. Plus for making the search as accurate as possible you can add new conditions to match your needs. **The Bad** Antivirus plugins are not exactly offering the flexibility desired by a user as it greatly limits the antivirus solutions a user can use with the software. Having a shortcut for marking the messages as "spam" or "not spam" would greatly ease the process of message cleaning. I wish the searched information would be highlighted in each of the returned results in order to permit the user a faster decision on the relevancy of the result. The evaluation version we tested did not include all the settings of a registered copy of the software ergo it is not a fully functional copy, as stated on their website. **The Truth** All in all, the newest edition of The Bat! brings plenty of changes, but most of them are cosmetic. However, there are improvements in the speed of the application and RAM usage has been optimized (during our testing in minimized mode it took between 1.5MB and 6.5MB while with the interface on screen it raised to even 25MB). The application makes for an excellent email client especially if you handle multiple accounts at once and have special security needs. The Bat! successfully delivers a wide range of tools designed to completely automatize lots of routine actions. It manages to wrap a myriad of options into a nice looking, user-friendly interface, making the entire message handling learning process so much easier. You have 30 days to try it out and decide on the benefits it brings. But be aware that this is a professional software designed to deal with several accounts and users, targeting a certain user category. [Check out our previous review of The Bat!](#) *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*