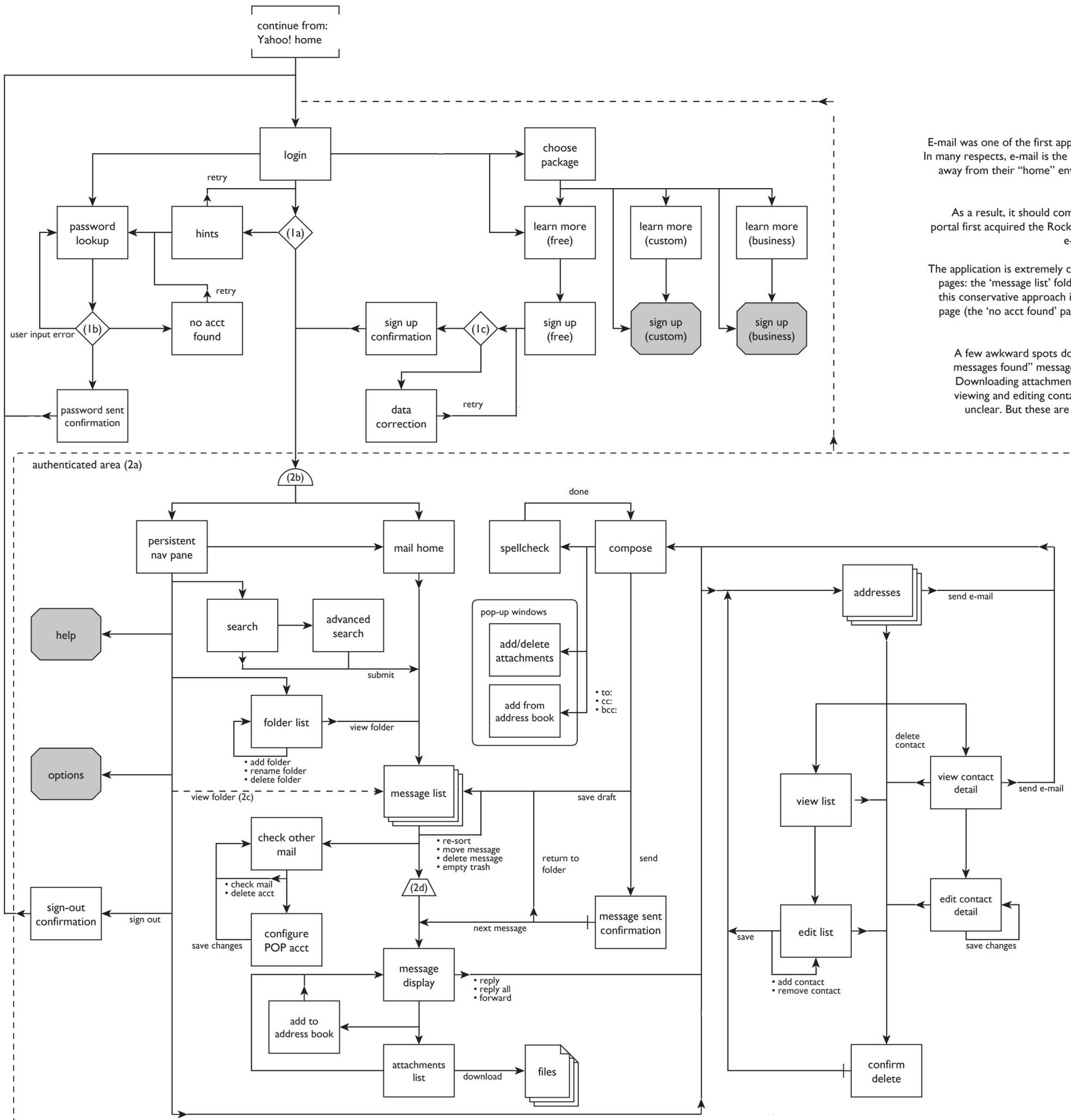# Yahoo! Mail
28 December 2001
diagram by Jesse James Garrett

E-mail was one of the first applications to move to the Web, and the first to find widespread popularity among users. In many respects, e-mail is the ideal Web application: it's an application that people often need access to when they're away from their "home" environment, and the core user tasks (reading and writing) are easily accommodated with standard HTML interface elements.
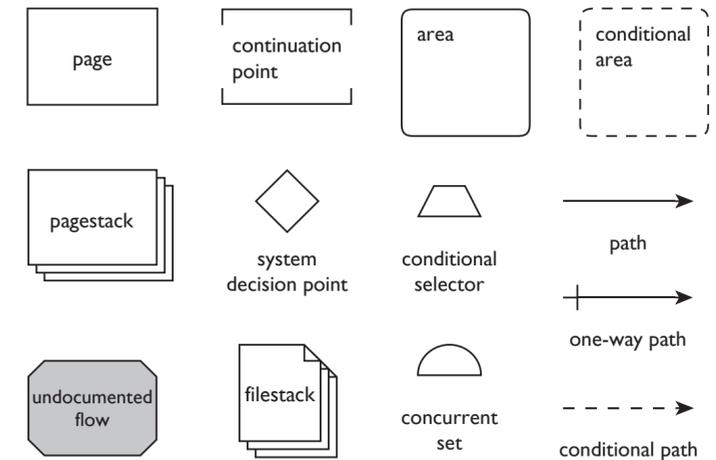
As a result, it should come as little surprise that the basic flow of Yahoo! Mail has hardly changed at all since the portal first acquired the RocketMail service in 1997. But rather than offering an outdated solution to the Web-based e-mail problem, Yahoo! Mail demonstrates the lasting effectiveness of a simple approach.

The application is extremely conservative with page designs. Almost all user interaction takes place across only three pages: the 'message list' folder view, the 'message display' page, and the 'compose' page. Another demonstration of this conservative approach is in the site's error handling. The entire application contains only one standalone error page (the 'no acct found' page in the login flow), and this seems more likely to be the result of a backend limitation than a deliberate design choice.

A few awkward spots do appear in the flow. An empty search result set returns a search result page with a "no messages found" message, rather than bringing the user directly back to the query interface to retry the search. Downloading attachments is a two-step process, which seems like one step too many. The dichotomy between viewing and editing contact information in the address book seems like an artificial distinction whose purpose is unclear. But these are really minor quibbles; overall, Yahoo! Mail is a model of streamlined interaction design.

Diagram nodes and labels

continue from: Yahoo! home

login — retry — (1a)
password lookup — hints — choose package
learn more (free) — learn more (custom) — learn more (business)
user input error — (1b) — no acct found — retry
sign up confirmation — (1c)
sign up (free) — sign up (custom) — sign up (business)
password sent confirmation
data correction — retry

authenticated area (2a)
(2b)
persistent nav pane — mail home — spellcheck — compose
help
search — advanced search
pop-up windows
add/delete attachments
add from address book
• to:
• cc:
• bcc:
folder list — view folder
options
• add folder
• rename folder
• delete folder
view folder (2c)
message list
check other mail
• check mail
• delete acct
save changes
configure POP acct
sign-out confirmation — sign out
• re-sort
• move message
• delete message
• empty trash
(2d)
return to folder — save draft — send
message display
• reply
• reply all
• forward
add to address book
attachments list — download — files
message sent confirmation
next message
confirm delete

addresses — send e-mail
view contact detail — send e-mail
delete contact
view list
edit contact detail
save changes
edit list — save
• add contact
• remove contact
done

LEGEND

page | continuation point | area | conditional area
pagestack | system decision point | conditional selector | path / one-way path
undocumented flow | filestack | concurrent set | conditional path

For more details on the use of these elements, see
http://www.jjg.net/ia/visvocab/

NOTES

(1a) If login info is valid, proceed to (2b); otherwise, go to 'hints' page.
(1b) If password lookup authentication info is valid, proceed to 'password sent confirmation'; if username is invalid, proceed to 'no acct found'; otherwise, return to 'password lookup' with error message.
(1c) If sign-up info is valid, proceed to 'sign-up confirmation'; otherwise, go to 'data correction' page.

(2a) If user attempts access to any page within the authenticated area without a valid session cookie, go to 'login' page.
(2b) 'Persistent nav pane' appears as a frame concurrent with all pages throughout the authenticated area of the site.
(2c) If the user has chosen to display the list of folders in the nav pane, navigation directly to the 'message list' for each folder is permitted.
(2d) The 'message list' page only allows navigation to 'message display' pages for those messages contained in the current folder (or messages meeting the search criteria, in the case of search results).