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SMTP relay through a smarthost: sending mail from a VPS or from an application

E-mail

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<https://www.meu.interweb.co.mz/knowledgebase/2150>



This article is for people with a VPS or server with root access, or an application that sends e-mail. The short answer: instead of your server delivering mail straight to each destination over port 25, it hands it to **a mail server that is already trusted** (the smarthost), with a username and password, over 587 or 465. That server makes the final delivery. It solves three problems at once: outbound port 25 blocked by the network, a VPS IP with no reputation or reverse DNS, and an SPF record that does not include the VPS.

Direct sending or through a smarthost

What	Direct (port 25)	Through a smarthost (587 or 465)
Who delivers to the destination	The VPS itself, connecting to each recipient MX.	The mail server where you have your mailbox, or a sending service.
Outbound port	25, which many networks and providers block outbound.	587 (STARTTLS) or 465 (SSL/TLS), the authenticated submission ports.
Reputation and reverse DNS	Those of the VPS IP. A new IP, or one without PTR, often ends up in spam: PTR and reverse DNS .	Those of the smarthost.
SPF and DKIM	The domain SPF must include the VPS IP, and DKIM signing must happen on the VPS.	Those of the delivering server count, if the domain already has them set up for it.
Limits	Those of the VPS and the IP reputation.	Those of the smarthost: an ordinary mailbox is not a bulk sending service.

Setting up Postfix with a smarthost

1

Create a mailbox just for sending (a notifications address, for example) and use it as the sender. Many servers refuse, or flag as suspicious, a sender that differs from the authenticated account.

2

Check that the VPS reaches the port: `openssl s_client -starttls smtp -connect mail.yourdomain:587 -quiet` If it hangs with no answer, it is the VPS or network firewall: **ports and firewall on a VPS**.

3

In `/etc/postfix/main.cf`, add (or change) these lines: `relayhost = [mail.yourdomain]:587`
`smtp_sasl_auth_enable = yes`
`smtp_sasl_password_maps = hash:/etc/postfix/sasl_passwd`
`smtp_sasl_security_options = noanonymous`
`smtp_tls_security_level = encrypt` The square brackets tell Postfix to use the name as it is, without looking up its MX.

4

Store the credentials in `/etc/postfix/sasl_passwd`, on a single line, and protect the file: `[mail.yourdomain]:587 sender@yourdomain:the-password`
`chmod 600 /etc/postfix/sasl_passwd`
`postmap /etc/postfix/sasl_passwd`
`systemctl reload postfix` On Red Hat family distributions Postfix needs the `cyrus-sasl-plain` package to authenticate; on Debian and Ubuntu, `libsasl2-modules`.

5

Send a test and read the log (`/var/log/maillog` or `/var/log/mail.log` , depending on the distribution, or `journalctl -u postfix`). Look for `relay=mail.yourdomain` and `status=sent` . A 535 error is the username or password; “no mechanism available” is the missing SASL package.

Copy main.cf before you touch it and reload Postfix only after checking the syntax with `postfix check` . And use the smarthost for system and application mail, not for newsletters: a mailbox that sends in bulk gets blocked, and takes the domain normal mail down with it.

An application does not need Postfix: nearly all of them take an SMTP server in their settings (server, port, username, password). It is the same smarthost, set up in the application itself. To choose between SMTP and a service with an API, see **sending by SMTP or through an e-mail API**.

The smarthost relay will not authenticate, or mail still lands in spam? Send us the Postfix log lines, without the password.

[Open a support ticket](#)

SEE ALSO

[Sending e-mail by SMTP or through an e-mail API: which suits your application](#)

[PTR and reverse DNS: why your e-mail depends on it](#)

[Ports and firewall on a VPS: why your app is not reachable](#)

[Creating your SPF record, step by step](#)

[SMTP ports 465, 587 and 25: SSL, STARTTLS and which one to use](#)

[Testing IMAP, POP3 and SMTP by hand with openssl s_client: a guide for technical users](#)



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