

Aid4Mail Backgrounder

The Evolution of Email Forensics: How a Swiss Software Company Became the Global Leader in Email Evidence Collection

The Email Evidence Challenge

In 2025, more than 376 billion emails are sent daily worldwide—and this number continues to grow. For investigators, eDiscovery professionals, and legal teams, email has become both the most valuable source of digital evidence and one of the most challenging to process effectively.

Traditional digital forensics platforms—tools like EnCase, FTK, AXIOM, RelativityOne, and Nuix—excel at case management, disk imaging, and analyzing diverse data types. But when it comes to email-specific workflows, they face persistent limitations: they must ingest entire mailboxes before filtering, cannot collect cloud-hosted attachments, struggle with modern email formats, and often miss critical evidence hidden in corrupted or deleted messages.

The result? Investigations that drag on for weeks, review costs that skyrocket, and critical evidence that too often goes undetected. In cases where a single overlooked email can mean losing a litigation or allowing a criminal to walk free, these gaps represent an unacceptable risk.

This is the landscape that Aid4Mail was built to transform.

The Fookes Software Story: From Geology to Global Innovation

Swiss Roots and Scientific Foundations (1989–1996)

The story of Aid4Mail begins not in a Silicon Valley garage, but in the laboratories and field sites of Earth Sciences research. In 1989, Eric Fookes—a geologist with a Master of Sciences in Carbonate Sedimentology from the University of Geneva—created his first commercial software: a DOS program that modeled the effects of sea-level change on sedimentary deposits.

This early work revealed something distinctive about Eric's approach to software development. Where others saw complex scientific problems, he saw opportunities to build practical tools that transformed how professionals worked. The program's success demonstrated that sophisticated analytical capabilities could be packaged into software that was both powerful and accessible.

Eric's approach to innovation was shaped early in his academic career by a keen attention to detail and an ability to see what others overlooked. In 1991, while studying fossil reefs near Geneva, he discovered an unusual foraminifer inhabiting cavities within bioclastic substrates—an organism that had eluded researchers examining these same formations for decades. He brought the find to the attention of Professor Wernli, and the following year they jointly published the formal description of the new genus and species, *Troglotella incrustans*, in the *Bollettino della Società Paleontologica Italiana*—a discovery that opened a long-standing discussion about endolithic versus cryptobiotic life strategies among Jurassic foraminifera.

This same capacity to identify overlooked details and unmet needs would define Eric's later software development work. Where others saw email processing as a solved problem, he saw gaps that mattered to professionals. Where competitors relied on third-party libraries and accepted their limitations, he looked closer and built better solutions from scratch.

In 1995, Eric obtained a license for Delphi 1, which allowed him to transition from MS-DOS applications to Windows 3.1 programming. His first Windows project was a utility he created to manage what became the first World Wide Web directory of Earth-science-related sites—a project that proved successful but short-lived due to limited time.

In 1996, Eric began developing NoteTab as a small experimental project to learn Delphi 2. Initially conceived as a simple imitation of Windows Notepad, he gradually added advanced features that he personally found useful. A friend who saw the program suggested he sell it online, but doubting anyone would pay for such software, Eric released it as freeware. To his surprise, NoteTab quickly gained attention and generated a flood of encouraging emails.

That same year, Eric founded Fookes Software as a sole proprietorship in Geneva, Switzerland.

In 1997, Eric received a letter from *PC Magazine* announcing that Super NoteTab had been selected as a finalist for their Shareware Awards. He flew to the U.S. to attend the Shareware Industry Conference in Warwick, Rhode Island. Though NoteTab did not win, meeting other independent developers who were making a living from their software inspired him to create a commercial version.

Less than a month later, in July 1997, Eric released NoteTab Pro (version 3.0) and sold it online through ideaMarket for just \$5 per license. Its success soon provided a sustainable income, allowing him to leave his PhD research and focus entirely on software development.

In May 1998, Eric received another letter from *PC Magazine* announcing that NoteTab Pro was a finalist—this time winning both the prestigious *PC Magazine Shareware Award* and the *Shareware Industry Awards (SIA) People's Choice Award*. *PC Magazine* published full-page feature on NoteTab Pro, catapulting it to prominence as one of the most popular text editors of its time. Over the years, it went on to receive numerous awards and distinctions from PC World, Microsoft, and WUGNET.

NoteTab established Fookes Software's reputation for building tools that professionals depended on daily—a reputation built on Swiss principles of precision, reliability, and attention to detail.

The Shift to Email Processing (1999–2005)

By 1999, Eric had accumulated a substantial number of emails from NoteTab users and business partners. His growing collection of locally stored Eudora mailbox files had become increasingly difficult to manage and search. To address this, he developed a personal Windows utility that allowed him to search, filter, and display his emails more efficiently.

What began as a simple personal tool soon evolved into a larger project supporting multiple email formats. This project ultimately became Mailbag Assistant, which Eric released in September 1999.

By this time, email was becoming central to business operations, but the tools to process it were fragmented, unreliable, and often failed to preserve the integrity needed for legal or archival purposes.

In 2002, Paraben Corporation approached Eric to create a rebranded version of Mailbag Assistant for the digital forensics market. The resulting product, named E-mail Examiner, was distributed by Paraben and served the forensics community successfully until 2011. The response from the field was immediate: investigators and attorneys desperately needed better tools to handle email evidence.

In 2003, Eric, his wife, and their two daughters moved from Geneva to Charmey, a village in the French-speaking Swiss Prealps—where Eric continues to lead the company's innovation efforts today.

This feedback from the forensics community led to the development of Aid4Mail, which was first bundled with E-mail Examiner in 2005. Initially focused on email conversion and migration, Aid4Mail quickly distinguished itself through capabilities that competing tools couldn't match: comprehensive format support, forensic-grade metadata preservation, and the ability to repair corrupted mailboxes that other tools simply abandoned.

Growing Trust and Market Leadership (2005–2015)

Throughout its first decade, Aid4Mail steadily earned the trust of increasingly demanding users. Law firms discovered they could rely on Aid4Mail to preserve evidence with court-defensible accuracy. Government agencies found it could handle formats and archives that general-purpose tools couldn't process. Fortune 500 companies adopted it for both litigation and large-scale email migrations.

Over the following years, the CLI version of Aid4Mail was adopted as an OEM solution by several leading eDiscovery and digital forensics providers, including X-Ways, Symantec, and Recommind (now part of OpenText Corporation).

In 2008, Eric transformed Fookes Software into a limited company and subsequently established Fookes Holding Ltd as the parent company, owning Fookes Software Ltd and all its intellectual property.

That same year, Fookes Software was approached by Google, which sought an email conversion solution for its Postini service. The collaboration led to the development of an OEM version of Aid4Mail Console, integrated as a core component of the Postini platform and used by millions of users worldwide. This partnership continued successfully until 2016.

In 2010, Bloomberg Finance L.P. contacted Fookes Software to integrate Aid4Mail into a new service designed for its clients' compliance officers. As part of this collaboration, Aid4Mail became a key element of Bloomberg's automated message archiving and retrieval system, responsible for converting email data between formats—specifically transforming Bloomberg's EML-formatted messages into PST files for client delivery, and performing the reverse conversion for archival storage. This partnership remained active until 2018.

Several factors drove Aid4Mail's growth during this period:

Uncompromising data integrity. Aid4Mail's in-house development of all core functionality—rather than relying on third-party libraries—meant tighter integration, better performance, and crucially, more reliable preservation of the metadata, folder structures, and message properties that matter in legal contexts.

Superior recovery capabilities. Aid4Mail consistently recovered emails from corrupted mbox files, damaged PST archives, and problematic formats that competitors couldn't handle. In head-to-head tests, Aid4Mail routinely achieved close to 100% recovery rates where competing tools recovered as little as 30% of messages.

Continuous innovation. Rather than treating email processing as a solved problem, Fookes Software continuously evolved Aid4Mail to handle new formats, new services, and new investigative requirements. Each release added capabilities that responded directly to field requirements from investigators and legal professionals.

In April 2016, Aid4Mail's excellence was formally recognized when Fookes Software won the *Software Innovation Solution of the Year* award at the European IT & Software Excellence Awards in London. Competing against six other finalists, Fookes Software took home the prestigious award for their outstanding Aid4Mail solution provided to cloud-archiving company Sonian (acquired by Barracuda Networks in 2017).

"With so many high-scoring entries, choosing outright winners in each category was particularly hard this year," said John Garratt, Editor of IT Europa and head panel judge. "This shows how

responsive the industry is, particularly among the software developers and ISVs who are so determined to deliver results for their customers.”

As the only Swiss company to win one of Europe’s most prestigious industry awards that year, Fookes Software helped raise the profile of Swiss innovation and service, proving it to be among the best in Europe.

The Modern Era: AI, Cloud, and Enterprise Scale (2016–Present)

As email evolved, so did the challenges facing investigators. The shift to cloud-based email services like Gmail and Microsoft 365 introduced new complexities. Users no longer attached files directly—they shared links to documents stored in Google Drive, OneDrive, and SharePoint. These “modern attachments” were invisible to traditional forensics tools, yet they often contained the smoking-gun evidence investigators needed.

Meanwhile, the explosion of email volume meant that processing entire mailboxes had become prohibitively expensive. A single custodian might have hundreds of thousands of messages spanning a decade or more. Review costs were spiraling out of control, and the traditional keyword-based approach to finding relevant evidence was showing its limitations.

The launch of Aid4Mail 6 in March 2025 represented the most significant leap forward in the product’s 20-year history—and arguably the most significant innovation in email forensics in decades.

Aid4Mail 6: Redefining What’s Possible

Industry-First AI Integration

Aid4Mail became the first forensics and eDiscovery solution to integrate artificial intelligence from leading providers including OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, Mistral, Meta, and xAI. But this wasn’t AI as a buzzword—it was AI as a practical tool that fundamentally changed how investigators work.

Traditional email search relies on keywords. An investigator looking for evidence of bribery might search for terms like “bribe,” “kickback,” “under the table,” and dozens of variations. The problem? Sophisticated actors use coded language. Innocent messages get flagged. Genuine evidence slips through. For international investigations, the challenge multiplies: each keyword must be translated into every relevant language.

Aid4Mail’s AI integration changes this paradigm entirely. Instead of keywords, investigators can now use natural language prompts:

“Return True if this email discusses financial transactions appearing to circumvent reporting requirements, use of multiple accounts to obscure money flow, or any indication of structuring deposits. Return False if legitimate.”

This single prompt replaces dozens of keyword combinations and catches subtle or coded references that keyword searches miss. The AI understands context, intent, and meaning—not just word matching. Most importantly, these models work seamlessly across languages, analyzing emails in French, Korean, Arabic, or any other language without requiring translation or multilingual keyword lists.

Aid4Mail supports three core AI capabilities:

AI Filtering searches by meaning rather than keywords, dramatically reducing false positives and negatives. The AI returns a simple True or False determination based on your prompt—ideal for rapid inclusion/exclusion decisions.

AI Classification extends this concept beyond Boolean logic. While similar to AI Filtering, it allows you to define multiple meaningful categories such as Responsive, Privileged, Harassment, Fraud, or even “Unknown” when neither True nor False is appropriate. You can use predefined categories or allow the AI to determine categories dynamically based on the content it discovers—providing far more investigative nuance than simple yes/no filtering.

AI Analysis extracts intelligence directly from emails and attachments: summaries, translations, data extraction (names, dates, monetary values), and inference (tone, urgency, threat levels).

The results have been remarkable. In rigorous testing, a 5 GB mailbox containing 50,900 emails was processed by Google’s Gemini 2.0 Flash in under 8 hours for less than \$12, with misclassification rates under 4%. This level of accuracy, combined with AI’s ability to process in any language, represents a quantum leap in investigative capability.

Perhaps most significantly, Aid4Mail offers something no competing solution provides: **offline AI processing**. While cloud AI offers speed and convenience, highly sensitive investigations—government cases, defense work, trade secret disputes—often cannot send data to external services. Aid4Mail uniquely supports running large open-source AI models entirely on-premises, ensuring that sensitive data never leaves the investigator’s control.

Cloud Attachment Collection

Modern email isn’t just text and attached files—it’s a web of links to documents stored in cloud services. When a user shares a Google Doc link or a SharePoint file, traditional forensics tools capture the link but not the actual document, its revision history, or its access permissions.

Aid4Mail 6 introduced comprehensive cloud attachment collection, supporting Google Drive (including Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, and Forms), OneDrive (Personal and Business), and SharePoint. Crucially, Aid4Mail can capture not just the current version of a document, but the

specific version that existed when the email was sent—critical for proving what information was actually disclosed.

All metadata is preserved: document authors, collaborators, viewers, timestamps, version IDs, and sharing permissions. This information is stored in a searchable CSV file (FileMetadata.csv) that provides a complete audit trail.

This capability has proven transformative in insider trading investigations (proving exactly what financial projections were shared and when), IP theft cases (demonstrating unauthorized access to trade secrets), and regulatory compliance (showing who had access to sensitive data).

As of 2025, Aid4Mail is one of the very few tools globally—and arguably the only comprehensive solution—that collects cloud attachments from both Microsoft and Google platforms with full metadata and revision control.

Portable Email Viewer

Sharing evidence shouldn't require expensive licenses or risky cloud uploads. Aid4Mail 6 introduced a browser-based, zero-installation Email Viewer that runs directly on any device—Windows, macOS, or Linux.

The viewer handles 50,000+ emails with smooth performance, supports advanced fielded searches (e.g., `from:alice subject:invoice -status:spam`), includes tagging and annotation capabilities, and filters by AI classification categories. Security is built-in, with sandboxed rendering that blocks scripts and malicious content.

Most importantly, the viewer is freely redistributable. Law firms can share curated email sets with outside counsel or regulators without licensing fees. Government agencies can provide portable review packages to oversight bodies. Corporate legal departments can distribute evidence internally for privilege review.

Enterprise-Scale Collection

Aid4Mail 6 also introduced Microsoft 365 App-Only Access, enabling silent, tenant-wide collection of all organizational mailboxes without requiring user credentials. For enterprises, law firms conducting broad litigation holds, or government agencies responding to regulatory audits, this capability eliminates the logistical nightmare of collecting credentials from hundreds or thousands of users.

Combined with Aid4Mail's native pre-acquisition filtering—which queries servers directly and downloads only relevant messages—organizations can now perform surgical collections that reduce data volumes by 90% before download, dramatically cutting storage, processing, and review costs.

The Technology Behind the Performance

Aid4Mail's market-leading speed and reliability stem from several technical decisions that set it apart from competitors:

In-house development of core functionality. Unlike tools that rely on third-party libraries for MAPI, IMAP, or MIME parsing, Aid4Mail develops these capabilities internally. This ensures tight integration, better security, and crucially, the ability to optimize performance and handle edge cases that break third-party solutions.

Format specialization. Aid4Mail supports over 40 email formats and cloud services, but this breadth comes with depth. Each format is handled with specialized code that understands its quirks, preserves its metadata, and works around its limitations.

Forensic-grade recovery. Aid4Mail includes sophisticated recovery capabilities that go far beyond simple conversion. It repairs corrupted mbox files, recovers double-deleted (unpurged) emails from Exchange Recoverable Items and other hidden locations, and carves MIME messages from unallocated disk space.

Advanced search architecture. Aid4Mail's search engine supports not just basic Boolean queries, but also full PCRE2 regular expressions, proximity operators, multilingual stemming in 24 languages, and recursive attachment searching (including nested archives and embedded metadata).

EDRM MIH+ deduplication. Aid4Mail implements the Electronic Discovery Reference Model's Message Identification Hash standard—plus a proprietary enhancement (MIH+) that generates reliable identifiers even for emails that lack Message-ID headers, such as drafts and sent items.

Market Impact and Adoption

Today, Aid4Mail is used by:

- **Half of the Fortune 50 companies** for litigation, compliance, and email migrations
- **U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, and CIA** for criminal and national security investigations
- **Top 100 law firms globally** for eDiscovery and litigation support
- **Leading universities and national libraries** for digital preservation and archives
- **Government agencies and NGOs** in over 100 countries for regulatory compliance and public records management

This trust has been earned through consistent delivery of results that matter: faster investigations, lower costs, and most importantly, evidence that stands up in court.

The financial impact is measurable. A typical RelativityOne deployment costs \$27,000 to \$45,000 per terabyte annually for hosting. Aid4Mail's pre-acquisition filtering routinely reduces datasets by 90% before ingestion, translating to savings of \$24,000 to \$41,000 per terabyte on the first project alone—often covering multiple years of Aid4Mail subscription costs in a single case.

For law firms and corporate legal departments, the impact on review costs is even more dramatic. AI classification can reduce the volume requiring manual attorney review by up to 90%, translating to hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings on large matters.

The Swiss Advantage

Fookes Software's Swiss heritage is more than geographic—it's fundamental to how the company operates. Switzerland's reputation for precision, reliability, and trustworthiness is reflected in Aid4Mail's architecture and support model.

Quality over speed. Rather than rushing features to market, Fookes Software rigorously tests every release, scans with VirusTotal, and validates compliance with international standards.

Customer-driven development. Features are based on real-world investigator and attorney needs gathered through direct customer feedback, not theoretical requirements dreamed up in a boardroom.

Long-term stability. In-house development of core functionality ensures that Aid4Mail isn't dependent on third-party components that might be discontinued, compromised, or suddenly change licensing terms.

Award-winning support. Fookes Software provides direct access to technical experts who understand both the software and the investigative workflows it supports, with rapid response times that reflect Swiss standards of service.

Looking Forward

The email forensics and eDiscovery landscape continues to evolve. Cloud-based collaboration is becoming universal. AI capabilities are expanding rapidly. Data volumes continue to grow. Regulatory requirements—from GDPR in Europe to PIPA in South Korea—demand more sophisticated approaches to data minimization and privacy protection.

Fookes Software's roadmap addresses these challenges directly:

Expanded AI capabilities with additional model providers and enhanced offline deployment options for sensitive environments.

Deeper cloud integration as Microsoft and Google continue to evolve their collaboration platforms.

Enhanced enterprise features for large-scale, automated workflows across distributed organizations.

Stronger compliance tools to meet evolving global privacy regulations and legal standards.

With over 25 years of email processing expertise—longer than most competing forensics vendor—Fookes Software is uniquely positioned to continue leading innovation in email evidence collection and analysis.

Why It Matters

In an era where email remains the dominant form of business communication and the primary source of digital evidence, the tools used to collect, process, and analyze that evidence aren't just technical choices—they're strategic decisions that affect case outcomes, costs, and risks.

Aid4Mail's innovations—from AI-powered analysis to cloud attachment collection to portable review—represent more than incremental improvements. They represent a fundamental shift in what's possible: investigations that once took weeks now finish in days, evidence that was previously invisible is now captured, and costs that threatened to make thorough investigations prohibitively expensive are now manageable.

For investigators seeking truth, attorneys building cases, and organizations protecting their interests, Aid4Mail has become an essential tool—not because it's the biggest or most heavily marketed solution, but because when the stakes are highest and the evidence most critical, it consistently delivers results that others cannot match.

Additional Information

Company: Fookes Software Ltd

Founded: 1996 (Aid4Mail launched 2005)

Headquarters: Charmey, Switzerland

CEO: Eric Fookes

Website: www.aid4mail.com

Company Site: www.fookes.com

Media Contact:

press@fookes.net

Typical response time: 24 hours on business days

Available Resources:

- Press Kit (logos, screenshots, fact sheet, executive bio)
- Product documentation and user guides
- Free trial (no time limit, no credit card required)

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