

The Exchange Message Tracking Center or How to Save Your A\$\$ in a Pinch

Will Schmied

Enabling the Exchange Message Tracking Center

By default, message tracking is not enabled in Exchange Server, but it is something that you will want to configure at the earliest possible opportunity. The only real downside to message tracking is that you will consume some extra system resources along the way-however this is not a large concern these days on adequately powered systems. If you are trying to run Exchange Server on the bare minimum of systems (and have other resource heavy applications on the same machine), you may see a decrease in performance from message tracking; in all other cases, don't expect to have any problems as a result of tracking messages.

To enable message tracking you must select the Enable message tracking option from the General tab of the server Properties page, as shown in Figure 1. To open the server Properties page, right-click the server of concern and select Properties from the context menu.

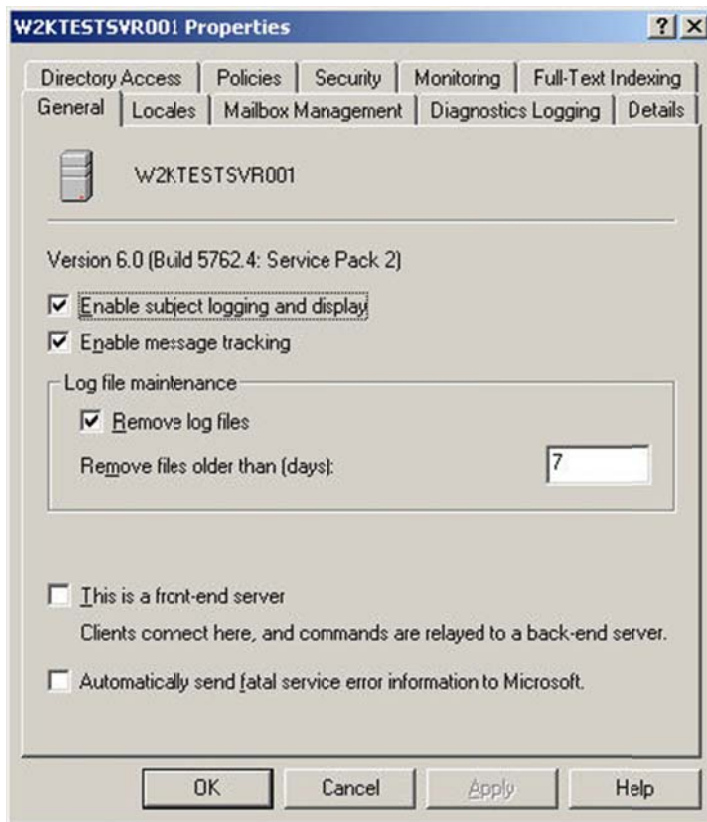


Figure 1: Configuring message tracking.

If you also want to track and display message subjects you should place a check in the Enable subject logging and display check box. I will show you the difference between having this selected and not selected later in the article (can you guess what it is?). The last configuration you need to make is when (if ever) to remove the message tracking logs that will be written by the tracking

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process. As you can see in Figure 1, I've configured log removal for 7 days. You may want to consider something between 15-30 days depending on how much and how important your average message traffic is.

That's all you have to do:pretty simple, eh? You will need to do this for each server in your organization if you have more than one. The next thing to do now is sit back and wait for the day you need to track down a message:that's the next topic of discussion.

Using the Exchange Message Tracking Center

Using the Message Tracking Center is a fairly straightforward experience, similar to searching through Active Directory. Most administrators should have no problems at all quickly finding messages they are looking for-provided that your logs date back far enough to support finding the message in question. The Message Tracking Center is located in the Tools node of the Exchange System Manager and is shown in Figure 2.

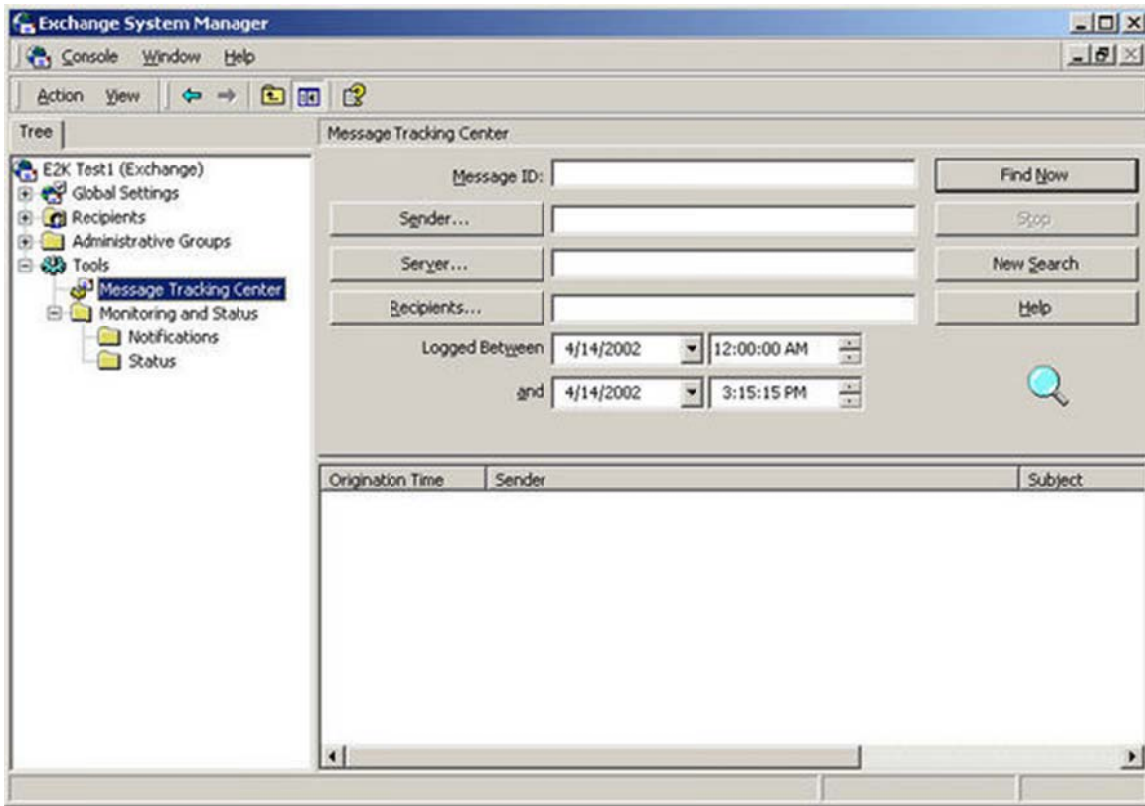


Figure 2: The Message Tracking Center.

To search you need to specify a minimum amount of data, to include the server of concern and either a sender or recipient. Additionally, you need to provide the date range to search within. Figures 3 through 6 show the selection of the sender, server, recipient and date range respectively.

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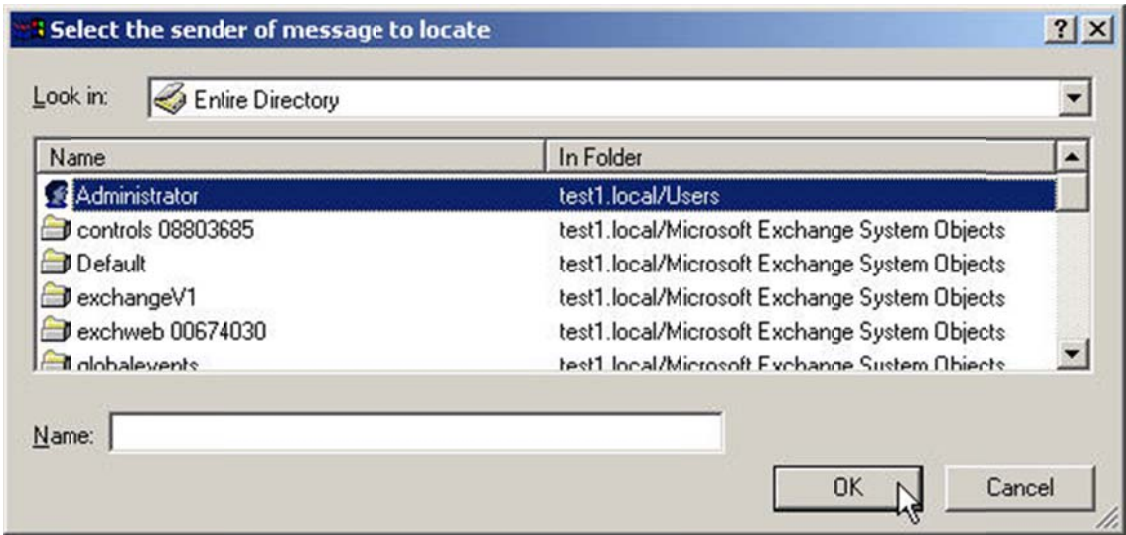


Figure 3: Selecting the sender.

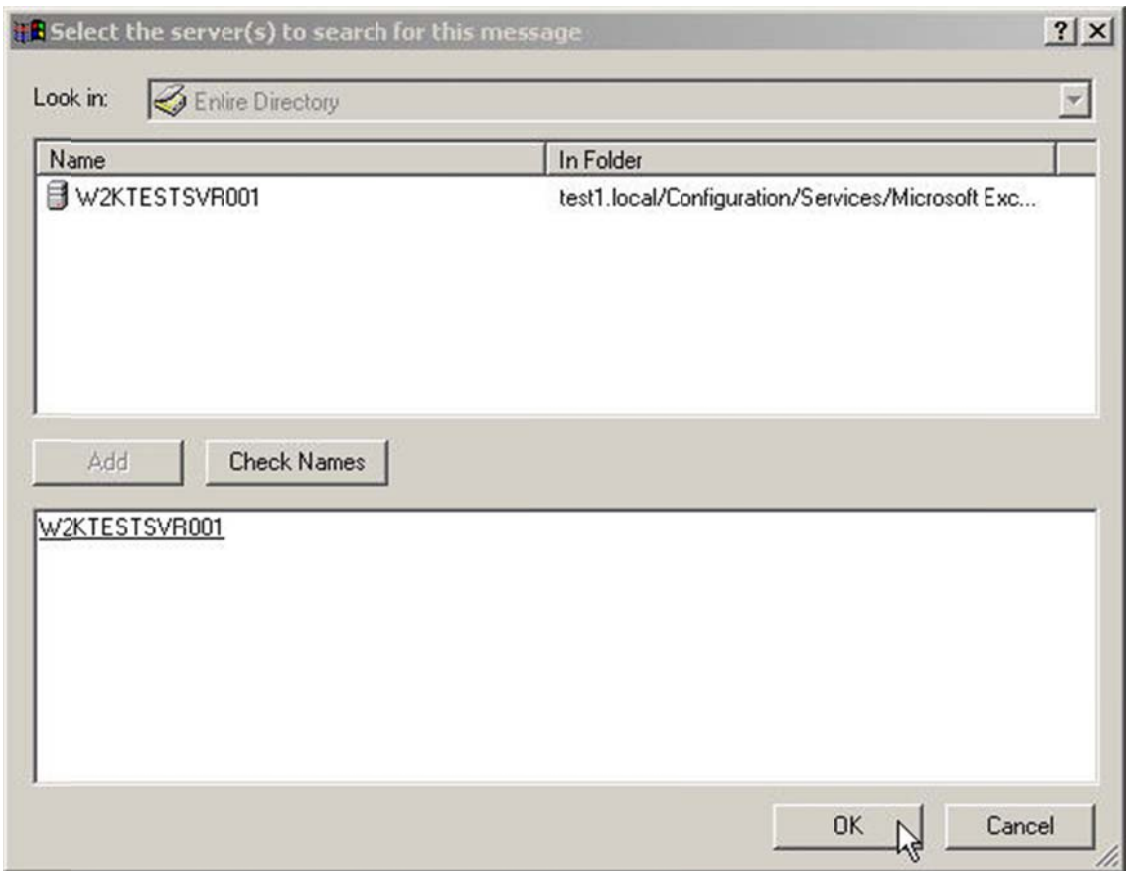


Figure 4: Selecting the server.

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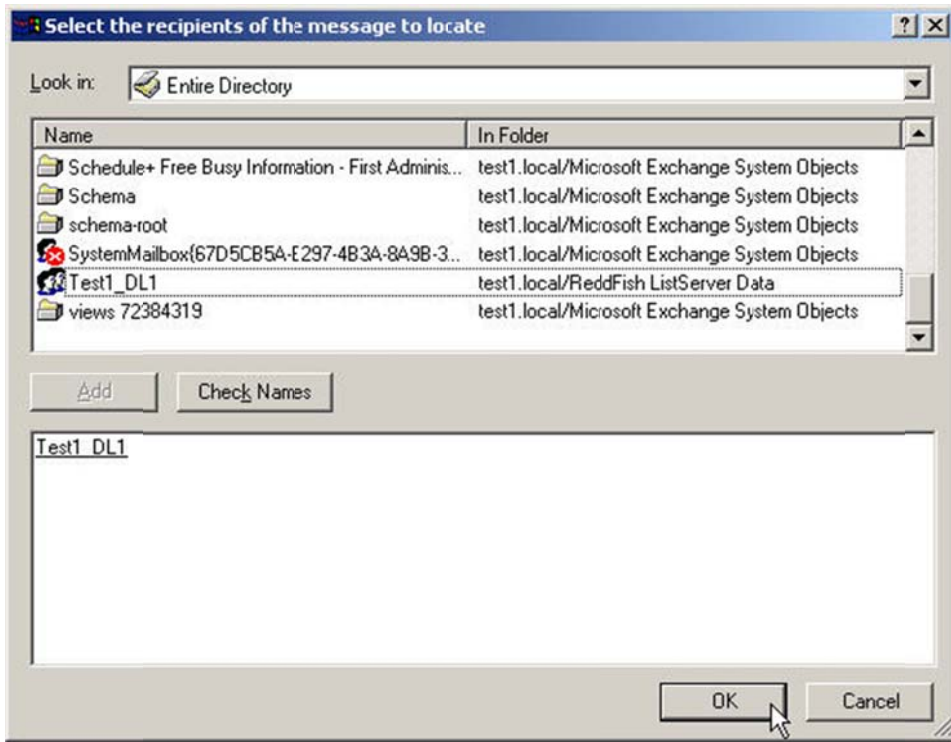


Figure 5: Selecting the recipient.

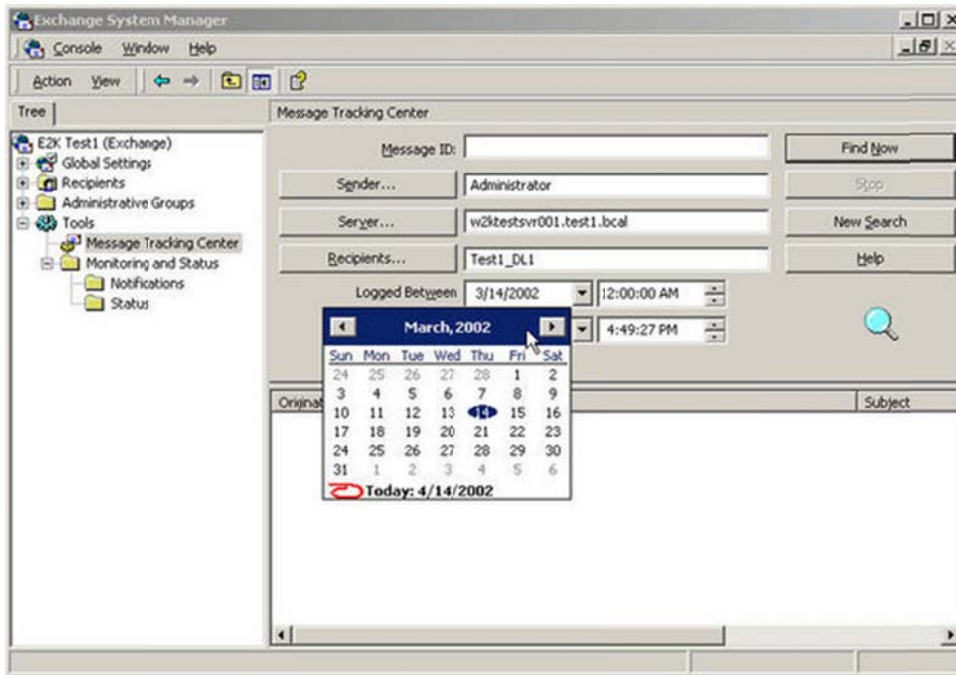


Figure 6: Selecting the date range.

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Clicking **Find Now** will start the search with the parameters configured while clicking **New Search** will clear all fields. Figure 7 shows the results from a search I conducted using the parameters shown.

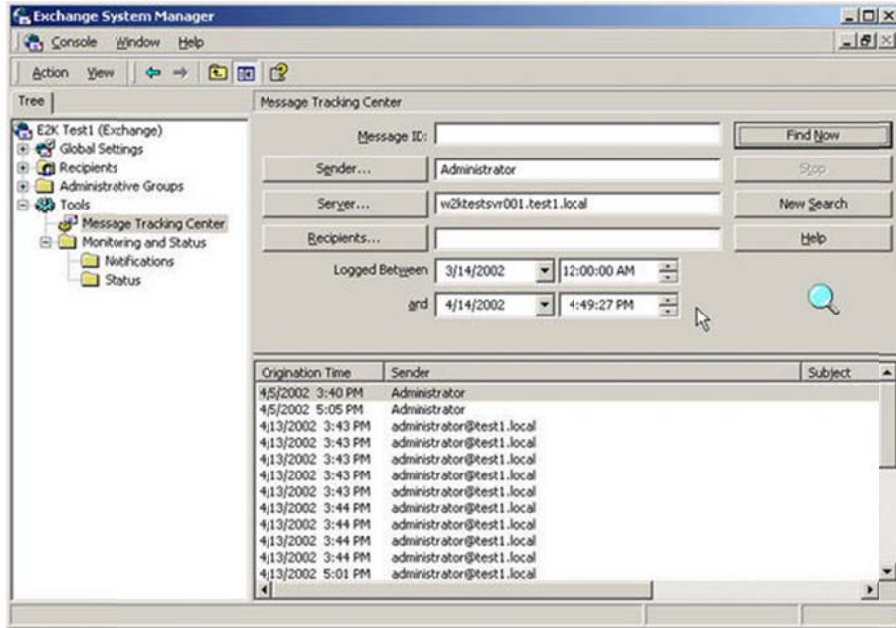


Figure 7: Search results.

By selecting any specific message, you can gain additional information about it, as shown in Figure 8. Note that Figure depicts a message that was sent to an internal recipient. Figure 9 shows SMTP information as this was for a message that was sent to an external recipient.

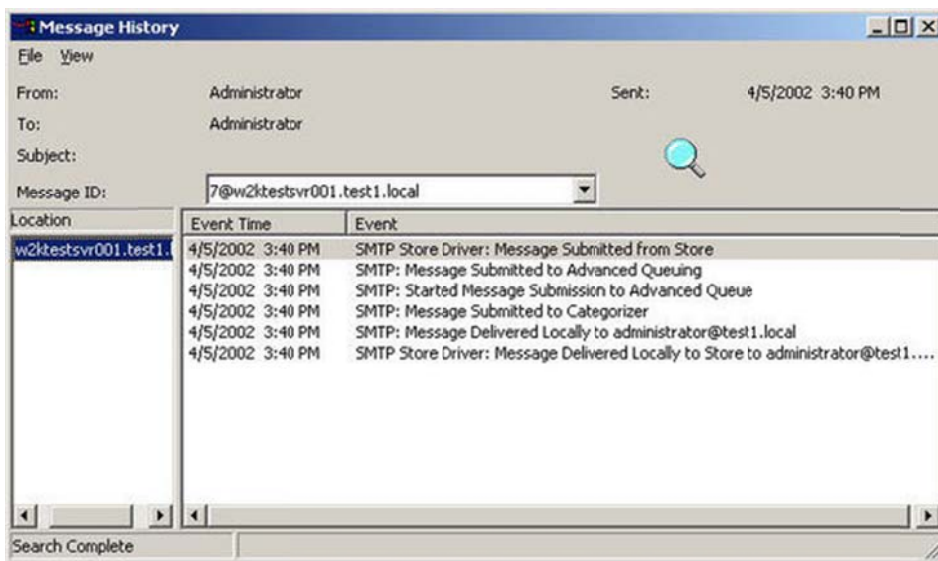


Figure 8 - Details for an internal message.

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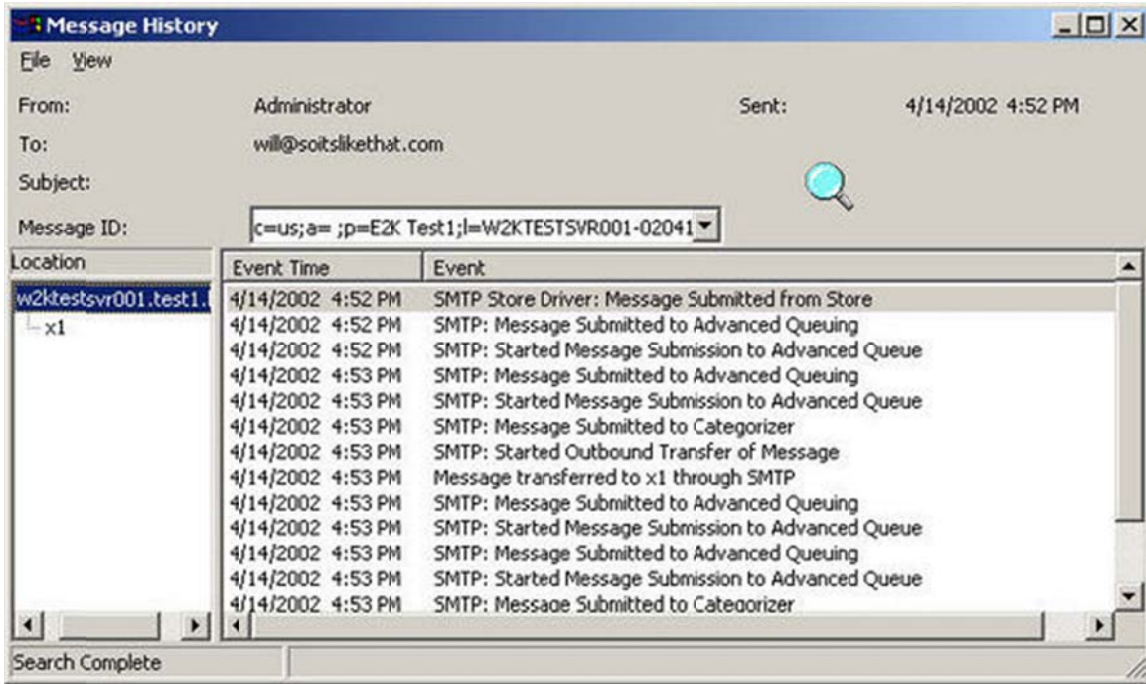


Figure 9: Details for an external message.

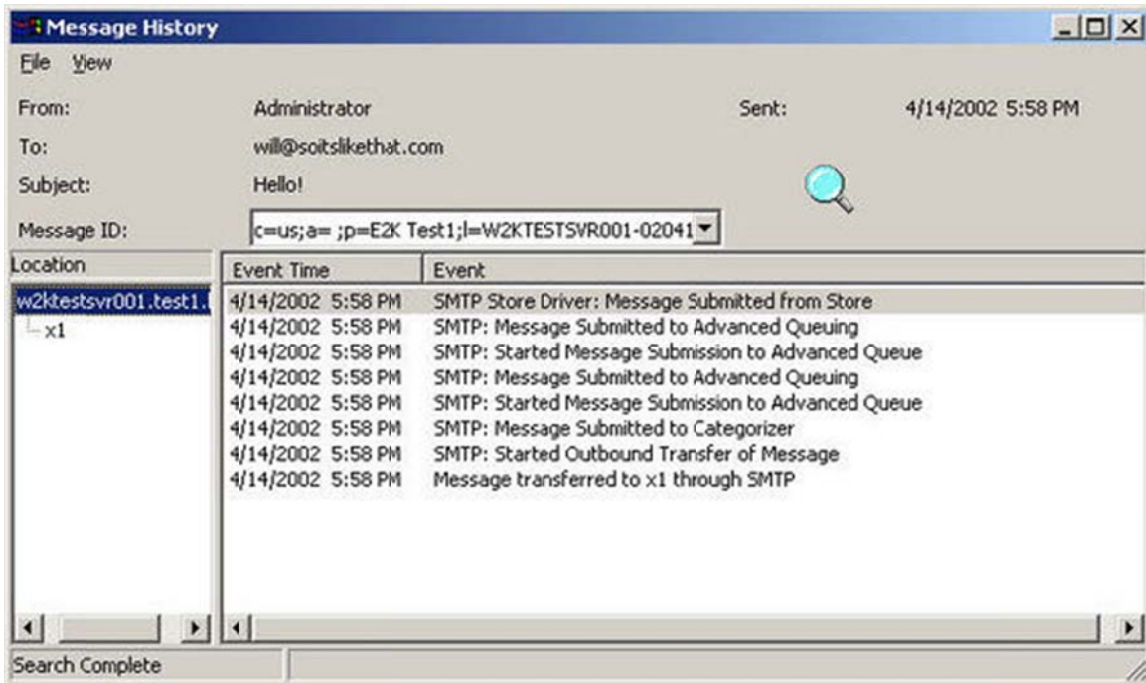


Figure 10: Details for an external message with subject line data.

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Other Important Stuff

Your tracking log files will be stored (by default) in a folder located at x:\Program Files\Exchsrvr\servername.log, where x is the volume you have installed Exchange Server onto. Inside this folder you will find a text file for each day that logs are being retained for. You can open these files and work from them if you want, but I would recommend doing it in Excel as the files are tab-delimited and very hard to sort through otherwise. You could even write a custom script to parse the logs and create an easy to read report for you should you desire.

The Message Tracking Center has been upgraded in SP2 and can track messages anywhere in an organization, even on Exchange 5.5 Servers or Exchange 2000 Servers running SP1 or below. MSKB # Q311840 has more information on this and also some problems that you may experience running the Message Tracking Center on an Exchange 2000 SP2 machine.

Should you need to troubleshoot public folder replication problems, you can search for messages that have been sent from an alias similar to the following:

Pub-IS@yourdomain.com. By tracing the message path, you may be able to determine where the messages are disappearing at.

Well, that's really about all there is to say about the Message Tracking Center. Hopefully you can use it to save the day and be the hero. Have you got a story about using the Message Tracking Center? Let me know by sending me an email, I'd like to hear how it's working for you.