



The Chat Room

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Oh, That Nasty Spam!

Ever tried SPAM? You know, that delicacy on isle three of your local grocery store. When I was just a kid, my next-door neighbor's mom used to make him fried SPAM sandwiches all the time. I was offered this delicacy numerous times, but the smell kept me miles away. I think I would have rather eaten boiled turnips.

Today, the word "spam" holds a far nastier reputation than the odd-tasting potted meat we all know. Spam is the nickname given to all of the unsolicited junk email we receive every day in our inbox. There isn't a day in the office that we do not deal with spam.

For those of you who may not know how the term spam was given to our junk email, here is a brief explanation.

According to *The Net Abuse FAQ*, the prevailing theory is that the term is from the song in Monty Python's famous spam-loving Vikings sketch that goes, "Spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, spam" The Vikings, who were sitting in a restaurant whose menu only included dishes made with spam, would sing this refrain over and over, rising in volume until it was impossible for the other characters in the comedy sketch to converse.

However it got its name, most of us find that the deluge of unwanted junk email is a hassle, and can be time-consuming for anyone. Let's just say that you get an average of 15 spam messages per day and you spend a couple of minutes to open and read each message. The amount of time you would spend on your junk email would be approximately eight full working days of your year.

The Federal Trade Commission has been forwarded more than 8,300,000 individual pieces of UCE (unsolicited commercial email) since January 1998, and the UCE mailbox (uce@ftc.gov) has received an average of 10,000 new pieces of UCE every day of the week.

At this point, you may be asking yourself how so many companies are able to access your email address and bombard you with all of these unwanted junk emails. Let's examine a couple of the basic ways this happens, and then we will discuss some ways to potentially cut down on the amount of spam you get on a daily basis.

The most common reason many of us receive spam in the first place is that we have readily given out our email addresses to a website, while registering for a free gift or signing on to gain access to a website's newslet-

ter. Many Internet companies rely on the sale of email addresses to make revenue. For instance, let's say you are really interested in collecting antique furniture. You spend many hours on the Internet retrieving information on antique furniture, visiting numerous websites. One of these antique websites allows you to sign on for a newsletter that will be sent out once a month, letting you know of antiques that have been spotted, or about pricing updates. Because you are an avid collector, you are excited about signing on immediately to get the newsletter. Now remember, it told you the email was only going to come through once a month.

Within a couple of days, you have noticed several emails have come through that deal with antique furniture and at first, it seems pretty awesome. After all, isn't this what the Internet is all about—valuable information? After a few weeks, you notice you are receiving at least two emails per day dealing with antique furniture, but, in addition, you are now receiving all types of email relating to contests, events, and specials that don't even remotely deal with antiques. In fact, much of it doesn't apply to you at all.

What has probably happened is this. The online antique furniture website has held true to its word and has only sent you one email so far. However, they have probably sold your email address to other companies that offer information or deal in the world of antiques. This is another source of income for the antique company. Meanwhile, your spam load has shot through the roof as a result of one site email registration.

Now that we have discussed spam and we know what it is, let's examine several ways in which you can poten-

tially reduce the amount of this unsolicited junk in your email inbox. I recently ran across an awesome list in *On Magazine* that gives 10 tips for a spam-free mailbox. Here they are.

10 Tips for a Spam-free Mailbox

1. Choose a complex email address: JaneDoe@aol.com will probably get much more spam than JAD1970@hotmail.com.
2. Think backward: Spam attacks often run alphabetically and get cut off in midstream when an Internet service provider (ISP) notices the attack. Start your email address with a letter from the end of the alphabet.
3. Keep a low profile: Chat rooms, message boards, Internet directories and web pages are prime harvesting sites for spammers. Be careful where you post your email address, or use another email address just for posting and online shopping.
4. Share your address carefully: Websites have widely varying policies about what they'll do with your address when you register. Read the fine print of each site's privacy policy before you type in your address.
5. Don't be a sucker: No matter how tempting it might be to quit smoking in 30 days or get out of debt by the end of the week, don't fall for it. Even if the message isn't a scam—and it probably is—it will just generate more spam in your mailbox.
6. Don't "opt out": Telling a spammer to "unsubscribe" you or take you off its list just confirms there is a real person behind your email address and makes it all the more valuable for resale to another spammer.
7. Filter with caution: Use your email software to filter messages, but don't file suspicious messages directly to the trash without glancing at the subject headers first. There is a slight possibility you might trash the mail you wanted.
8. Turn them in: Forward any spam you receive to your ISP's abusive email address and to the service that sent the message.
9. Don't blame the messenger: ISPs

are waging a constant fight against junk email. Log your complaints with your service, but know that the ISP is on your side.

10. Take it to Washington: Forwarding all your spam to your Congressman's inbox won't help stop the flood of spam. However, a cool-headed anti-spam letter or email will influence your representatives when they vote on anti-spam legislation.

Email is a vital part of our lives now, not to mention our businesses. How many of you out there could just remove email from your life with no adverse effect? I dare say, not many.

I hope these tips help raise your awareness of how to keep your spam level at a minimum. I doubt we will ever win the war against it, but we sure can keep the beast in check.

If you have any questions or topics you would like answered or covered in this column, please email me, Travis Stirewalt (travis@coatingdepot.com), or call me at 615/641-7988. *P&SF*