WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT SPAM?

Don Bridle, ToPCity Solutions, writes about dealing with unwanted E-mails.

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Spam (unwanted, or junk, e-mail) accounts for over 70% of all European e-mail traffic. The European Commission estimates that it costs European business several billion euros a year in lost productivity. So what can we do about it?

There is a short answer and a long answer. The short answer is that you cannot completely stop it. The long answer consists of the ways we can do a lot to cut it down, many of them very straightforward. Because of the persistence of some unethical users of the Internet there will always be ways of collecting e-mail addresses and spamming them (sending unsolicited e-mail to them all). It is true that service providers are clamping down on some by capping the number of messages being sent at any one time, and even disabling accounts of known law-breakers. However, the spammers know plenty of ways of avoiding being caught, so we still need to implement some safeguards.

> *spam accounts for 70% of e-mail traffic*

Some ways to cut down on spam:

- Try to make sure you only give your e-mail address to reputable contacts. Insist before giving the address that they do not pass on your details to others (unless you particularly want them to, of course!) Also check that they have an opt-out procedure if you expect regular messages from them. This is a legal requirement in many countries, including the UK, and ought to be an ethical necessity anywhere else.
- When you send an e-mail to more than one contact, use the BCC feature in Outlook Express or the equivalent in AOL etc. Using BCC (Blind Carbon Copy - how's that for modern technology?) will mean that no-one sees the other addresses. This can also be achieved by putting normal brackets around the list of addresses.

> *use the BCC feature in Outlook Express*

- If other people send to multiple addresses and you find your address is one amongst many in the e-mail heading, ask them to adopt the BCC procedure for the protection of all concerned. It isn't that you don't trust the people on that particular list, but messages tend to be forwarded again and again. The list of addresses grows and grows, and it only takes one person later on to collect them and everyone ends up on a spammer's list with the resulting annoyance and time-wasting.

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- ❧ Use the Outlook Express feature 'Block Sender', found in the Message drop-down menu, to block any further messages from a specific address. This works if the sender doesn't change their address, but spammers usually do.
- ❧ Investigate filters in your email program to organise incoming mail and kill files which stop mail ever reaching your mail box.
- ❧ Invest in a good piece of software to intercept nuisance messages, and have at least one member of staff trained to use it responsibly. Usually this will allow blocking from addresses with similarities (eg. fred23@aol.com as well as fred39@aol.com) and many other features. However, these programs vary in hype and reliability. Sometimes they can be a nuisance if they are not used with understanding; some important messages might be quarantined when you don't want them to be, for instance.
- ❧ If possible, change your own e-mail address from time to time. This may be the address you use to mail out information without the recipient being encouraged to answer, or the one used for chat rooms newsgroups and subscribed lists. Reserve your permanent address for important contacts.
- ❧ In junk e-mail that you receive never click on the "Unsubscribe" link. The best you can expect is that nothing happens, but you may end up with even more spam as the sender realises you responded.
- ❧ Notify your e-mail provider. AOL users can click on a "Report Spam" button or forward the e-mail to COSMAIL1 or COSMAIL2. Otherwise use the method from your provider (eg. FSB, Virgin, Tesco etc) to notify them. Providers are getting better at blocking spam. Virgin.net claims to be blocking 2.5 million junk mails every day!

Last December the UK brought in legislation concerning directories used to send e-mails and text messages. It is now a criminal offence to send these without the recipient agreeing in advance (an opt-in agreement). Existing customers should

you have a right not to appear in directories

be able to opt-out if they want to. It is a little unclear quite how business e-mail addresses are affected, but they are likely to be exempt. People now have a right not to appear in publicly available directories and should be asked for their consent in advance. This all has a bearing on legitimate marketing by your club. As there are financial penalties for non-compliance with the new law, you should check carefully before buying lists of addresses. More details about possible impact on clubs and societies will be published here when it is available.

Notes:

Read the EU directive at www.hmso.gov.uk

Visit http://www.the-dma.org/antispam for more information on the American scene.

AOL users look up keyword: Email Controls

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