

Stop Spam: Protect Yourself and Your Friends

What most annoys Internet users? The answer is the four letter word “**Spam**” - those obnoxious, unsolicited email messages touting get rich quick schemes, miracle diets, amazing beauty products and pornographic pleasures. Unlike paper junk mail, which senders pay for, spammers pay almost nothing to email millions of their offensive messages. It's your ISP and ultimately you that have to bear the cost of transmitting unwanted email across the Net. AOL, MSN, Earthlink, Yahoo! and other email providers try to block spam before it reaches your mailbox, but their efforts are only partially effective.

Some countries have laws against Spam and some spammers have been fined for their actions, but the practice continues. In fact, it is increasing. Why, you may wonder, when spammers are universally despised? Because it works! Sending email in bulk is so cheap that even if only a handful of people respond, there's a profitable payoff for the spammer. Unfortunately, spam is here to stay. That doesn't mean you have to be an innocent victim. Here's how to fight back:

Protect your email address! Spammers either buy lists of email addresses or use software programs (web crawlers) that mine the addresses from the Internet. If your address is posted in discussion groups, on websites, chat rooms, blogs, and **mass mailing lists**, the chances are that it will end up being captured by a spammer. Only post your address publicly when absolutely necessary. If you have to post your address, you can fool the mining software by writing it this way – *teacher (at) school.com*. Instruct people who want to email you to replace the @ sign with **(at)**.

Never put a long list of email addresses in the TO: field. To respect people's right to privacy, long lists of addresses should be put under one group name or dropped in the **Bcc: field** where they cannot be viewed or captured by web crawlers. Also, do not put full names of your friends and family in your email Address Book – use nicknames, initials, or first names only. If you care about the person, protect their identity!

Set up multiple email accounts. If you do participate regularly in online sites where you post your address, then set up another email account using an alias. Use different accounts for different purposes. **You are NOT legally required to use your real name.** Refrain from using your name in your email address – use initials and numbers.

Use spam filters. Many email programs, such as Outlook, have built-in tools that block messages sent from certain addresses or that filter messages based on keywords you define. To learn how these features work, check the online help pages for your email software.

Use anti-spam software. You can install special software designed to eliminate spam. Some work by matching incoming messages against a list of known spammers; others block messages that do not match a pre-approved list of acceptable addresses. Most email programs now have built-in spam filters.

Don't respond. Spammers continue their pernicious practice because it's effective. Help stomp it out by boycotting them. Do not buy their products regardless of how enticing the offers may be. Some clever spammers include instructions at the bottom of the message on how to remove your name from their list. *The worse thing you can do is to reply.* Why? Because it tells the spammer that you read your mail and that your address is valid. The result may be that you get even more junk mail. **BLOCK** them instead.

Opt-out. Some websites require you to register to use their services. Before you do, review the site's privacy policy to see how it uses your personal information, like your email address. You can also use an alias. If the site sends out commercial messages, you should be given a choice whether you want to receive email from the site or from its third party partners. If you do not want to hear from them, be sure to check the **No** box.

Remove your address from directories. Your address may be listed with people finder services, such as Yahoo People Search and other directories that are goldmines for spammers. To prevent your address from being harvested, email those lookup services and ask them to remove your name.

Report violators. A number of government agencies and private organizations accept complaints. Whether they can actually do anything to stop the deluge is an unanswered question. Among the ones to contact are: [SpamCop](#), [The National Fraud Information Center](#), and <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2004/07/newspamemail.shtm>