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UCE (Unsolicited Commercial Email)

a.k.a. Junk Mail or "spam"

For most of us, the majority of emails we receive have titles like "Urgent... you have won!", "As you requested..." The list can go on forever. The official term for this type of email is Unsolicited Commercial Email (UCE). It is also known as spam. And, yes Virginia, it is "spam," not to be confused with "SPAM." SPAM® (note all capital letters) is a luncheon meat made by Hormel Foods. See their website for a history of SPAM/spam and the Internet (http://www.spam.com/ci/ci_in.htm).

In the year 2000, it was estimated that 10% of the email sent was spam. In 2004, it is estimated that 65 – 70 % of the email sent is spam. US organizations will spend more than \$10 billion on the war against spam in this year alone. Without expensive software and IT Departments small businesses find it difficult and costly to manage spam.

In December 2003, President Bush signed the "Can-Spam" (Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act) bill, creating the first federal law regulating spam. This law took effect January 1, 2004, but critics doubt that e-mail users will see a decline in the volume of junk in their in-boxes. Under CAN-SPAM, the Federal Trade Commission will have to prove that the seller (who hires a spammer to advertise a product or service) knew, or consciously avoided knowing, that the third-party mailer intended to violate the law. In order to prosecute spammers, this requires proof of both the seller's and spammer's level of knowledge. And after the law has been in effect for over 8 months, I know that the volume of spam in my mailbox has not decreased. ;-)

The spam problem is constantly growing, but how do we manage to put a stop to this? Can we cut down on the amount of spam we receive? Here are some tips:

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- Do not reply to or use the "unsubscribe" link. By doing so you are validating your email address and often add your email to the spammer's master list. (NOTE: you can use the unsubscribe link for REPUTABLE mailing lists. This is especially true if you have signed up for a list. EXAMPLES: You no longer want to receive Giant Eagle's Weekly Specials email, or you no longer want to be on the Victoria's Secret mailing list)
- Give out your email address sparingly. Register on websites' if it's absolutely necessary, and leave your address off of credit card applications. A good rule of thumb, if you don't want to receive spam, then filling in the requests on the internet is not a good idea.
- Use a separate email for forms, applications and websites. Many Internet Service Providers (ISP) will allow you several email addresses with your account. Get a separate one for all registrations, etc. Or sign up for a free email account with one of the many free email providers (like Hotmail or Yahoo) for these occasions.
- Use a spam filter. Spam filters will delete targeted email, by certain keywords or subject lines. *Be careful of how strong a filtering level you set up. Too much filtering will cause you to lose "real" email from business associates, relatives and friends.* Have spam go to a separate mail folder, and be sure to scan the folder before deleting all messages. You don't want to delete a valuable customer order!
- Report spammers to their ISPS. We will have a separate article about tracking spammers.

The truth about spam is that it is not an email or internet problem. It is an economic problem. If the spammers did not get a response from enough people, it would cost more money to send spam than they make. Without profits, spam would eventually stop.

Thanks,

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