



Slam SPAM: Getting Back at Spammers

Damn spam! It wastes your time. It carries germs – viruses and worms. It can kill your email system. And it is getting worse every day – or so it seems. What can you do about it?

We've gotten fed-up with the problem, so we started looking for a way to get back at spammers that is legal and ethical. Here is a prescription, if you wish to invest a little bit of your time to help put a stop to spam.

Spam Filters

First, to avoid wasting more time than needed, use whatever spam filters your email service provider offers. The problem with these is that they often filter legitimate email. So this alone will not solve your problem. But any junk you can filter out and delete without having to deal with it at all is at least a small step toward sanity.

An Ounce of Prevention

It seems that if you want to get anything productive done on the internet, you are required to supply your email address. While the majority of websites use this information for benign reasons, there are plenty of examples where seemingly legitimate requests for information are just ploys to "harvest" your email address. Be aware that Spammers can capture your email address even if you don't explicitly provide it.

Try these methods to keep your email address below the radar:

Keep Your Eyes Open

Before entering your email information into a website, you should find and read the privacy policies for that website. These policies should detail why the information is necessary, how it will be used, and how it will be protected. In particular, you should look for a statement promising not to sell your information, as many companies will sell your information to unappealing third parties.

Q: What if I can't find a privacy policy?

A: Have an email address handy for just such an instance.

Sign up for a free email account with hotmail.com, mail.yahoo.com, or netscape.com. If you feel uncomfortable entering your email address into a website, supply the address for your free account. Check your free account once a week – it's mostly junk mail anyway. If something important should arrive you'll still see it. Best of all, your primary email account won't receive the extra junk mail.

Protect Your Public Email Address

Even if you never give your email address out, there are still instances where spammers can find your address. Often, spammers use software to harvest email addresses from chat rooms, web pages, on-line bulletin boards, and newsgroup postings. If you must post your email address, be sure it's in a format that harvesting software won't find.

The web management and search engine optimization partner that we use at paulmcafee.com, Noein Inc., provides a free tool to help you do just that: <http://www.noein.com/tools/spam-no-more.htm>

With this tool, you can scramble your email address using JavaScript to prevent spammers from seeing it. Normal web viewers can still read your email address.

Spam Reporting

This is where you start to fight back. There are two email addresses where we send every bit of real spam¹ that makes it through our filters.

The Federal Trade Commission

- uce@ftc.gov – This is an email address at the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that collects spam. According to the FTC site, “Consumers currently send spam to the agency at a rate of approximately 15,000 e-mails a day using the agency's database address, uce@ftc.gov. The FTC has collected more than eight million spam messages since 1998.”
- For more information about the FTC email address, visit the site at www.ftc.gov/opa/2002/02/eileenspam1.htm.
- You also can find a Consumer Complaint Form at [https://rn.ftc.gov/pls/dod/wsolcq\\$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01](https://rn.ftc.gov/pls/dod/wsolcq$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01). Use this form only for domestic spam. The site gives directions for reporting foreign spam.
- Sending spam to the FTC gives them the information in case they want to take legal action against a spammer.

spamcop.net

- www.spamcop.net – This company offers several services. Start with their free spam reporting service, which you will find at <http://www.spamcop.net/accountadd.shtml>.
- The service description on the site is:

“SpamCop® helps you punish spammers for sending you their junk mail. This service is free. Often, spammers lose their accounts and even get charged "cleanup fees" by their internet providers. In addition, reporting spam to SpamCop

¹ We only report unsolicited spam that has no clear return contact information. This is different from business-to-business email marketing, where the sender is easy to identify, and where you feel certain you can ask for removal from the list if you don't want more email from the sending company.

results in blacklisting the sites responsible for allowing it to be sent. Unfortunately, life is still too easy for the spammer. They sign up with new accounts as fast as we shut them down. By reporting spam, you can help to turn the tide. SpamCop makes this otherwise slow and technical task quick and easy.”

How to Report Spam

The following directions are for Microsoft Outlook®. SpamCop provides directions for a variety of email options. You will have to register with SpamCop to receive a dedicated email address for your spam before proceeding. This looks like a long list of actions, but it only takes a few minutes to do once you are used to the process.

1. Open spam email, but do not open any attachments. Note that if the spam is in HTML format, the spammer can program the email to let him know that you have opened it, thus confirming that your email address works. To avoid sending this confirmation back to the spammer, it is best to set your email to open in text format only.
2. Select from the menu bar “View,” then “Options.” At the bottom of the dialogue box, select (highlight) all of the text to the right of “Internet headers:” and hold down the “Ctrl” and “C” keys to copy the message header information.
3. Select “Close” to close the “Options” dialogue box.
4. Select “Forward” to forward the spam email.
5. In the “To...” section, put uce@ftc.gov and your SpamCop email address.
6. Above any text that you are forwarding, place your cursor and hit the “Ctrl” and “V” keys to copy the message header into the top of your forwarded email.
7. On the menu bar, select “Insert” and “Item,” then find the original spam email and select it by double clicking on it.
8. Hit “Send” and then delete your original spam message.

9. You will get a confirmation message from SpamCop. Follow their directions to finish the reporting process. You can then delete the SpamCop message, and you are done.
10. You may need to install one of the programs that SpamCop recommends to fix a problem with the way Outlook forwards the original message header information. We've done this ourselves, using a free program available from the SpamCop site called "SpamSource." We found the process to be painless – and the program works well for us.

That's it. Spend a few seconds extra per spam message and start getting back at the spammers – legally and ethically. Good luck.

Credits

Paul McAfee wrote this white paper with help from the team at Noein Inc. You may email us at info2004@paulmcafee.com. This is an example of a throw-away email address. We'll change the address next year if we start to get too much spam on it.

Contacts

Paul McAfee

Principal, eXubrio, LLC
Owner, paulmcafee.com
Buffalo, NY
www.paulmcafee.com
Phone +1 (716) 568-0329

Robert Klingensmith

President
Noein Inc.
Buffalo, NY
www.noein.com
Phone + (716) 689-8886