

How to Stop Spam Getting in the Way

SPAM - A Brief Overview

SPAM and other email that is bundled in with it is quite a considerable problem for users of email all around the world.

The typical email user working in an email enabled environment cannot expect to escape spam. According to security vendor MessageLabs, at the end of 2006 spam accounted for 86% of all email traffic and is expected to be upwards of 90% by the end of 2007.

As an example, the external filter used by Fifosys's Clients regularly records over 70% spam for each Clients inbound email, and for a few even higher.

The amount of SPAM received by a company or individual can be related to many things including the company's profile, if the email address is publicised, if the individual registers in "news groups" etc.

The amount can further vary from time to time due to changes in the methods used to distribute SPAM and the improvements and alterations to systems to limit it.

How to Deal with it

As for what a typical company and their staff can do, there are several options each with their own costs, benefits and limitations. The first two are mechanisms that come as part of an Exchange/Outlook environment; that is they are designed by Microsoft. Whilst the next two are 3rd party solutions:

- 1. Exchange built-in filter:** This is already activated however it is a very basic filter which works on a UCE (Unsolicited Commercial Email) score. This has no heuristic or other advanced features and cannot be customised. Note that this filter does not scan emails over 3MB by (Microsoft) design.
- 2. Outlook built-in filter:** This is turned on by default with the setting as Low, there are four settings although the highest is usually unsuitable due to the restrictions and the lowest turns the filter off. As such it really only has two settings that most people would ever consider. This uses the same UCE scoring system as the Exchange server.
- 3. Internal Spam Filter:** This would be a separate application running on a computer that would receive email from the outside world and filter it prior to forwarding such email onto your email server. This involves purchasing both a server and application for installation locally and then maintaining both. This is not a recommended solution by Fifosys.
- 4. External Filter:** This is what Fifosys and most of our Client base uses. This solution has the added benefits of including a virus filter and stopping both before they access the Company's Internet connection or the local mail server. This means that your company's resources are not spent on dealing with junk email. Further, it also provides a buffer which will store emails in case your local mail server becomes unavailable for any reason.

Fact Sheet

The methods used to send SPAM and generate the email addresses used continually vary over time. These include processes called "harvesting", "phishing", "pharming" and "spoofing" to name but a few.

We will not try to outline all of the methods used and what they mean here as it would become very long and very technical. Instead we aim to give simple and straightforward advice on reducing the amount of SPAM you receive.

What can You Do Now?

In short Fifosys recommend an outsourced solution as noted in point 4 above.

In the mean time, until a SPAM solution is installed the best advice is to:

1. Move all emails that are from non-recognisable recipients to a separate folder, such as Junk Mail and review them later
2. Delete all emails that appear to be SPAM. They will go to the Deleted Items folder.
3. Empty your Deleted Items folder on a regular basis (right click the folder and select "Empty Deleted Items Folder")
4. Do not open emails from an unknown source, particularly if they have an attachment. Delete such emails.
5. Do not respond to SPAM emails or email asking you to submit your address, including "remove" requests from mailing lists (unless you are quite sure of the originator).

Apart from clogging up a computer system, disk space, computer resources, local network bandwidth and Internet connection bandwidth, SPAM will at least be of a nuisance value and may cause a company to be liable under UK regulations if there is any illicit (porn, obscenity, etc) content, especially if a company has not taken any steps to counteract SPAM.

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