Sales from the Internet – How To Limit Spam
By Dennis McDonough

The Internet has great tools for finding information about our customers, vendors and the competition. There are applications like email and instant messengers that allow us to quickly communicate. There are a lot of benefits, with the good also comes the bad: SPAM!

Spam is defined as flooding the Internet with multiple copies of the same message, in an attempt to force the message to people who would not otherwise choose to receive it. Most spam is junk advertising, like the junk mail we have gotten over the years.

Spam is often for dubious products, get-rich-quick schemes, quasi-legal services and some are just hoaxes. Spam is easy to create and it costs the sender very little to send -- most of the costs are paid for by the recipient or the carriers rather than by the sender. Some Spam is targeted for individual users with direct email messages.

Many Spammers use spider programs to crawl the web and gather email addresses off of websites. Including an email address on your website is important. People will want to contact you. There is even a special format hyperlink for email addresses to be a clickable link. By using this format a customer can click on your email link and automatically open up their email client.
The mail to link can be used against us. The spider engine can pick up an email address that is included in the text content

Here is how to stop the spiders from picking up your email addresses from your website.

A good place to start is to test to see what you need to change. Google.com is a text reading spider, like Spammers use to gather email addresses. Search for the complete email address and Google will return a list of pages that need to be modified.

Don't use the mailto: hyperlink tag. Instead provide a form that your customer can complete that is emailed by the web server to you.

Use a graphic image instead of text so people can read your email address if they don't wish to user your online form.

You will need to check your meta tags for included email addresses.

All of these steps should help curb your unwanted spam emails that take up your time.

Sales from the Internet: How To Limit Spam, Part 2

In last month's article, Spam was defined and a couple of methods you can use to stop Spammers from harvesting email addresses from your website were described. Spammers use these harvested email addresses as valid email addresses. This article covers a couple of other items to help protect from getting these unwanted emails.

Email filters.

Filters are a great way to eliminate Spam from your inbox. They can be very effective, but always have to be maintained. You don't want important business emails to be trashed, just to get rid of the bad email.

Email filters can be applied at the server and the client levels. The server can filter adult content and some other junk emails. The server filter needs to be created and monitored by your system administrator. Talk with them about the Spam you are getting, maybe others are getting these same emails. If everyone is spending time every day with Spam, imagine how much this can impact your company.

In the client software you can be more selective. Read the 'Help' section about filters in your email client before putting the filters or rules in place. Be proactive, but also be careful. Test your filters for a while by moving possibly unwanted files to a test junk folder instead of just deleting them. You will be able to review the emails on a regular basis before deleting them. After running the filters for a few weeks, you can be confident that the filter is set up correctly. When unwanted emails are being put in the test junk folder, then feel free to take the extra step and have these emails directly deleted for you.

Standard emails addresses and email groups.

There has been an understanding that when you set up a website you would have email addresses for communication with site owners, sales people, webmasters, etc. Usually these are setup as email groups or directed to a single email box that may be forwarded to others.

The standard email addresses include:
- Company
- Corporate
- Info
- Information
- Help
- Sales
- Web
- Webmaster

Spammers are not harvesting these email addresses, they are just blindly sending to them. Their software just takes a list of email addresses and adds on existing domains, then sends the email. They will live with the bounce backs from bad addresses just to get some emails through.

To stop this, rename your groups and individual email addresses. Add a company extension like Info_carlot@ecarlots.com or eclinfo@ecarlots.com. These extensions can make the difference of having an email box full of bogus offers or just messages from customers.

Domain registration.

Another place the Spammers go to harvest email addresses is your domain name registration information. Your registrar *Whois* data contains all the important information about contacting people about your site if there are issues. This information must be valid to follow the InterNIC standards.

The different domain registrars have standards for displaying the *Whois* information. Some domain registrars will allow you to pay extra for a 'protected domain' where the contact information is not released. Check with your domain registrar for their particular policies and features.

Any of these ideas can be put in place to help curb your unwanted Spam emails, saving you time and money.

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