

SPAM

Spam is unsolicited bulk email. This includes not only Nigerian scheme proposals, Viagra ads and the like, but also those cutesy powerpoint presentations and jokes that your aunt keeps sending you, complete with 137 email addresses of people you don't know. Spam is an issue about consent, not content. Whether the message is an advert, a scam, porn, a begging letter or an offer of a free lunch, the content is irrelevant - if the message was sent unsolicited and in bulk then the message is spam.

Spam is extremely effective for the advertiser. A 1% click rate (1 in 100 people click on the spam ad) will put money in his pocket like no other advertising scheme will. The only question is, how did they get your email address in the first place?

The answer is simple: you GAVE it to them. Yup, somewhere along the way, you typed your address into a web form, never suspecting that it would be sold to advertisers.

For example, Blue Mountain is a website that allows you to create online web greeting cards, complete with animations and sound. Unfortunately for you, it collects two email addresses every time you send someone a greeting; yours and your ex-friend's. Blue Mountain gets its revenue from selling your email address to advertisers who then spam you with targeted advertising. You didn't think they put up that site just so you could send greetings for free, did you?

Or maybe you emailed Ford Canada to ask about the options on a new Ford Escape. You got added to their list.

Or possibly, you are using online forums or newsgroups. During the sign up process you had to use a real email address, and the owners of the website now have a prime list of email addresses to sell to advertisers.

Heck, you're not even immune from your politicians. Email your local MLA and get added to the NDP mailing list, it worked for me!

The only real cure for spam is to get a new address. Better yet, get two; keep one private and guard it jealously and use the other as a throwaway for web signups and the like. Anti-spam programs have little appeal to me because they are running resident, slowing your PC down all the time, attempting to stop a problem that you caused in the first place. SaskTel High Speed Internet comes with the Postini spam blocking solution, which blocks spam (and viruses) before it ever gets to your inbox. You even get the opportunity to screen the mail directly in case there is something you actually do want.

As for your Aunt with the forwarding problem, courteously ask her to remove you from her bulk email list. She may not speak to you until next Easter, but at least you won't have to put up with the endless drivel that passes for high society these days. As a bonus, you will be happy knowing that she is not forwarding your address willy-nilly around the net.

If you have question or comments, I can always be reached via email sean@intrex.ca or join our forums at <http://intrex.ca> for more in-depth conversations.