

## What spammers have ruined

The following is a list of things which spammers and those who support and do business with them have polluted and rendered either completely worthless or vastly decreased the usability of. The list will surely change. Every time something new becomes available, spammers rush to be the first to abuse it in attempt to squeeze a nickle out of it before it's either secured or rendered inoperable. So as time goes by and spammers continue to abuse, this list will surely grow.

### 1) Email - General Use

Some people have already stopped using email for anything due to the relentless abuse. The load for so many is too high. It's too time consuming to sort through the spam for some. For others, too much of the spam is simply too offensive. The rising cost of handling the spam by the ISPs adds to that so some have already written off email as a method of communication.

### 2) Email - Use by Children

Fewer every day are allowing their children to trade email unsupervised due to the continuous flood of ads inviting little Jonny or little Suzie to to increase their penis sizes and visit porn sites.

### 3) Email - Use by Business

For businesses, wading through spam is time consuming and distracting. Some businesses choose not to use email for regular communication with clients as a result. Another problem is their legitimate solicited email being caught by spam filters because it contains a price list or a flagged word. It is making email less reliable with each passing day for business communication.

### 4) Email - Relays

Once viewed as vital and later as at least helpful, email relays were important in making sure emails reached their destination even if some links were down. Spammers have made it necessary to close all relays and deny email from companies who have open relays.

### 5) Email - Mail Lists

No one trusts email lists anymore. Too much abuse by spammers have made it necessary to add confirmation steps to prevent spammers from list bombing the innocent, and to make sure a legitimate list operator can maintain connectivity. The extra steps, although absolutely necessary due to the abuse, results in fewer participants in the list.

### 6) Email - Forwarding

People used to forward cute stories and joke to friends and family without worry. Spammers have polluted that by starting so many bogus

stories, hoaxes, and scams. They do it for scamming suckers who get copies and also to harvest addresses when it eventually makes it back to them.

#### 7) Email - BCC

To prevent the problem with Email forwarding, many people have had to block or filter out all email with their address in the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) field. BCC was once used to send a copy of an email to a third party without the knowledge of those in the "to" field. There are valid reasons for doing this, but spammers often abuse the BCC, using it to hide the bulk nature of the spam. As a result, nearly all the email sent to addresses in the BCC are spam and get dumped. And legitimate mail sent the same way gets dumped with it.

#### 8) Web - Posting Addresses

You can't post an email address on a web page anymore without the address being harvested and abused relentlessly. So if you want feedback, or even orders for your product, you have to use a web based email form. Many dislike the forms and don't use them, so that means less feedback and fewer orders.

#### 9) Web - Contact Forms

Web based contact forms are prime targets for exploitation by spammers who use them to send their spam. The page owner gets accused of spamming and loses his accounts then the spammer sends it through the next victim's form. So users of such forms have to update them when exploits are discovered.

#### 10) Usenet news groups

Popular news groups get flooded with so many usenet spams that they become unusable. A group may have 1000 active users, then once the popularity is discovered, the spammers abuse it until few users are left wading through thousands of spams, usually off topic and redundant, to find a dozen valid messages. In attempt to maintain the use of the group, the users may filter it, removing the spammers' message headers, but the spammers post each spam with different names or even random strings in the name or subject fields. Filter out subject "VIAGRA, for example, and the spammers just post with subjects like "V.I.A,G'R.A" to get past the filters. The result is fewer using the group and more trouble for the few who continue.

#### 11) Proxy Servers

Another once valid service, now virtually abandoned due to constant abuse by spammers trying to hide their connections.

#### 12) Windows Messaging

A promising service, built into Windows, enabled by default installs of Windows 2000, it now has to be disabled in order to prevent

constant message windows from popping up with spammers' ads. The system was intended for administrators to send messages to clients and for machines to send alerts to their admins.

### 13) AOL Instant Messenger

A highly valued application which is also being hit hard by spammers trying to peddle scams to people who just want to chat with each other.

### 14) ICQ

Similar in function to Instant Messenger, it's being similarly abused.

### 15) IRC

Internet Relay Chat. Countless "channels" of thousands of topics. Once a system for specific discussion in real time by groups sharing an interest, it's now considered just another hunting ground by spammers who are doing everything they can to pollute it into disuse as well.

### 16) File Sharing

To the user, it's a convenient way to share data from one computer to another or one user to another. To spammers, it's a hole to exploit in order to gain access to the open computer. The spammer can then convert it to a relay for sending his spam, and the owner of the target gets the blame.

### 17) Free Services - ISPs

NetZero is still around, but with far less service. Altavista, and a lot of others offered "free" internet access. Even K-Mart! But spammers consider it not a chance to surf the net for viewing a few ads, but rather an access point for sending spam. As a result the ISPs had to shut it all down.

### 18) Free Services - Web Pages

Free web pages were a great idea. The service makes its money by placing banner ads on the user's page in exchange for the service. But to spammers, it's just a way to hide. They put redirectors on the free page pointing to their real pages. Most victims only report the abuse to the free page host and miss the real page. As a result the free page host has to work more for less return and fewer such services exist. Some are even filtered. Some people filter out all emails containing any reference to a geocities page, for example.

### 19) Free Services - Email

Free email services like Hotmail and Yahoo are shrinking in number. The reason is abuse. If you have a hotmail address, unless it's an address like t6h29.dj-GF4!@hotmail.com, it's likely being flooded with spam even if no one has ever been told the address. Spammers use

"dictionary attacks" to send to every possible name and letter combination. Many people filter out all email from yahoo or hotmail. The irony is that often the yahoo or hotmail address in the "from" field isn't even valid.

#### 20) Free Services - FTP

One trick by spammers is to include a link in the spam pointing to a page or send the spam in html format, and load an image in the spam or page via ftp instead of http. If you aren't computer savvy, you may not know the difference. But many browsers are set to send the email address as an anonymous ftp password. What that means is opening the email or viewing the page sends your email address to the spammer. Free ftp accounts are also abused by spammers who use it to store files used in the spamming.

#### 21) Advertising - Banners

Banner ads had value until spammers abused them to the point where few notice them anymore. Today banner ads are considered virtually worthless.

#### 22) Advertising - Email

There is nothing wrong with email advertising, but the ONLY way to do it is through confirmed opt-in. However spammers have abused email so bad for so long that even perfectly legitimate advertisers fear using it. All too often, the list operator is a spammer and lies to the company who buys the ad. The company thinks they are buying a tag line in a list where every recipient has signed up for the email. Then they get the complaints while the spammer runs off with their cash.

#### 23) Advertising - Popups

OK, popups were a very bad idea anyway. But the free page hosts and others who use them are finding them beyond worthless now due to spammers who add dozens of popups for spamvertised pages. The reason is simple. If they can get you on their page, it doesn't matter how mad they make you as long as they get paid for ever banner which you have to close. As a result popup banner stopping apps are not commonplace, even necessary. The latest twist on this is "pop under" banners. These are just popup banners which hide behind the browser window so you don't see it until you close the main window and by then you don't know which page popped it up. You don't know who to blame.

#### 24) Offline - Business Cards

To spammers, it's just another way to harvest the address.

#### 25) Offline - Paper ads

To spammers, it's just another way to harvest the address.

#### 26) Offline - Web Links

To spammers, it's a place to look for email addresses.

#### 27) Offline - Product Registrations

Product registration is valuable. You can get important updates, alerts, even rebates sometimes. But few give valid email addresses anymore due to too many companies abusing the addresses. Some just spam them, other also sell them to other spammers. As a result, legitimate companies get fewer valid addresses for legitimate use.

#### 28) Offline - Orders

Place an order off line and some companies request an email address. You can't trust them with your personal address anymore due to spammers abusing them.

There are more, the list will surely continue to grow.

William R. James