Purveyors of **junk email** know… that even though most people **hate spam**, a small percentage **click on** the links and buy the products being sold.

Become a spam fighter

BY TYLER WHITAKER

Gone are the days when spam was only known as mystery meat. Unfortunately, most people receive so much unsolicited email — spam — eating mystery meat would be a welcome alternative. Now is the time to put down our forks, get smart and starting fighting this scourge.

Click with care

It's my bet that all of us agree that we hate spam. So, why does it continue? The answer is simple: it works. Purveyors of junk email know that even though most people hate spam, a small percentage actually click on the links and buy the products being sold. That begs the question, if all of us stop clicking the links and buying the products, will the spam go away? Let's hope so.

So, until we stop supplying the economic motivation to the spammers, we need to take extra steps to protect ourselves. That extra protection comes in the form of filters or firewalls. These solutions review each email in an attempt to determine if it is a spam or a legitimate email. In the early days, this was pretty easy to determine by the subject matter of the email. But as the early filters started cutting into the profits of the spammers, they started misspelling words and obscuring the subject matter.

This has resulted in an arms race between the anti-spam companies and the spammers. And every day brings more creative filters to defeat the increasingly imaginative attempts the spammers use to get through. Today's anti-spam technology uses advanced Bayesian statistics to score emails and predict when an email is spam or not. To counter, the spammers are using random text and graphics with heights and widths that change with each email.

Time to get tough

So what can I do? Start by installing and using a firewall and spam filter. Some of the best on the market are from McAfee and Symantec. They both offer very comprehensive solutions and they integrate with most of the popular email programs. Using a solution like this and can guard against both spam and viruses. Once your personal PC is protected, the next level of protection is at your email server. If your email is hosted out in the Internet, chances are you already have some level of protection. The key is to make sure that it is enabled and configured properly to catch the spam. If your company runs its own email server, you have other options. They range from free or open-source solutions like SpamAssassin or more commercial solutions like the Barracuda Networks Spam Firewall. Using anti-spam technology at both the server and the desktop is your best bet when it comes to fighting spam.

Do yourself a favor and put some spam filters in place. And at the very least, let's all stop reading, clicking on and buying from spam. Your new lean and mean inbox will thank you.

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