

## Spam - How Much Will it Cost Your Business?

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According to a recent study conducted by Ferris Research, a market and technology research firm specializing in messaging and collaboration, Spam will cost U.S. businesses over \$10 billion in 2003.

Spam not only clogs our servers and in-boxes, but it also costs us hours and hours of lost time in productivity.

Although the estimated cost of Spam focuses mainly on lost productivity, this picture may be much broader than you realize.

Some of the more popular email providers, such as AOL (America Online), Yahoo! and Hotmail, are now utilizing filters to cut down on Spam. These filters are dumping Spam and/or bulk mailings into a separate location. Although this may cut down on Spam in your in-box, these filters are also dumping some legitimate email messages.

What's more, some hosting services not only filter the email messages, but they're also blocking entire hosting companies. For example, the blocking host may have gotten some Spam complaints about a few marketers that host with ABC hosting company. (Keep in mind, ABC hosting company may host thousands of sites.) Rather than block the offending marketers, the blocking host decides to blacklist the entire ABC host.

What this means is if you try to contact someone and their hosting company has blacklisted your host, your email will not go through -- it will bounce right back to you.

If you suspect you may not be receiving all of your email, contact your host and ask them if they're using Spam filters or have blocked entire hosting companies.

### **How Much Will Spam Cost Your Business?**

How much time do you spend sorting through the Spam in your email each day? Add it up sometime -- I'll bet you'll find you spend a lot more time than you even realized -- time that could have been spent on your business.

If you're publishing an ezine or sending out any form of opt-in mailings, how many subscribers are actually receiving your mailings? Most-likely, not nearly as many subscribers as you may think. How many lost sales has this cost you?

How many messages, such as information requests, customer support requests, etc., have you not received due to filtering?

How many messages have you replied to that your customers or potential customers have never received due to filtering?

As customer service says a lot about your business practices, how many customers will you lose?

The list goes on and on. But the point is this, Spam is costing you dearly.

### **Protecting Your Email Address**

So how can you defend yourself? Well, it depends on which side you're on -- how to protect yourself, and/or how to make sure your messages are getting through.

In order to protect yourself against Spam, you first need to understand how your email address is obtained.

There are many unethical businesses online that collect and sell email addresses. They use robots that travel from link to link in search of email addresses. Their customers are led to believe that these email addresses belong to individuals who want to receive mailings. However, much of the time, this isn't the case.

Never purchase a list of email addresses from anyone other than a reputable company. The only company I can recommend is Post Master Direct. <http://www.postmasterdirect.com>

To protect your email address from these robots, instead of displaying your address on your site, use a feedback form. Not just any type of form, but a form that doesn't display your email address within the hidden form fields. The only form I can recommend is Master Feedback. You can pick up a free copy here:

<http://willmaster.com/master/feedback/index.shtml>

Anytime you're filling out a form online and you're asked to provide your email address, make sure you review the site's "Privacy Policy" to ensure that your email address will not be sold or shared with a third party.

## Protecting Your In-box

To protect your in-box, you can use a Spam filtering software program. Although there are several available online, the best one I've found is Mail Washer. This program will enable you to view all the email on your server without actually downloading it into your email program. Once you've reviewed your messages, you can create filters and bounce the Spam messages back to the sender. Although you can pick up the program free, consider supporting the developer and register the software for a small fee. <http://www.mailwasher.net>

## Avoiding the Spam Filters

If you're sending out a mailing to an opt-in list, there are a few steps you can take to make sure your message won't trip the Spam filters:

1) Avoid using trigger words, such as Spam, fr\*e, r\*move, etc. Although the list is far too broad to list here, you can learn more by reading the following articles:

Spam Filters Run-Amuck by Timothy A. Gross  
<http://www.iprofitssystem.com/articles/spamfilters.html>

CLIP & SAVE guide to avoiding Spam filters by Debbie Weil  
[http://www.imakenews.com/wordbiz/e\\_article000094161.cfm](http://www.imakenews.com/wordbiz/e_article000094161.cfm)

2) Avoid using JavaScript within your messages.

3) Avoid using "bad" words.

If you'd like to ensure your messages are getting through, consider opening email accounts with the popular providers. You can send your mailings to these accounts and monitor their reception. If your mailings land in the dump, you can make some adjustments or even contact the company.

If you would like to test your outgoing email messages to ensure they won't trigger a Spam filter, Ken Evoy offers a great service called SpamCheck. This free service will enable you to send a copy of your publication, or any email message, to a specific address and it will return a report of possible words that will trigger the Spam filters.

Send your publication including the subject and body to:  
<mailto:spamcheck-websource@sitesell.net>

## Conclusion

The Spam problem continues to get progressively worse. Although there isn't a simple solution to the problem, the information provided in this article should assist you in not only avoiding Spam, but also avoiding the filters for your legitimate mailings.

It's really a shame we're even in this position. However, we cannot allow Spam to continue to infiltrate our businesses. We must take the necessary steps to ensure our success.

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