The story of how I was blackballed by a system administrator because a spammer sent a nastygram falsely accusing _me_ of spamming generated quite a flurry of e-mail comments, all of them very encouraging and supportive. Several contributed additional information that readers may find interesting.

* * *

Jeff Anderson, President of ACI International Inc. <http://www.aciconnect.com> wrote,

"You hit a subject that we have recently encountered.

We maintain a mailing list of customers and potential customers who might be interested in our PC-based digital-video surveillance and control systems. Most of the addresses in the list have been collected from responses to advertisements, or from e-mails sent to us. We try very hard to qualify every address prior to including it, since it would be plain stupid to bother sending news and information to people who have zero interest in security. We send a newsletter about once a week or so, and honor all remove requests. There is a note in every e-mail offering to remove anyone who writes back and requests removal.

Last week we sent an e-mail newsletter and received five remove requests. Two of them were very interesting indeed. They both were similar in tone, beginning with the words

‘<Expletive> YOU, SPAMMER <expletive>, take my name off of your list NOW you scum.’

Here's the interesting part...BOTH of those emails came from suppliers with whom we had intended to place orders. One of them had just quoted a substantial order to us and we had received approval from the customer to go ahead and place the order.

The other supplier had contacted us and was courting us, hoping that we would do business with them. We were considering it until we discovered how they really behave.

One other thing we have encountered. It seems that a large number of people set up email aliases and have mail redirected from other accounts, then they forget that they have set this arrangement up. As a result, they write to us from ABC@somecompany.com and we discover that we have no addresses for them under the domain somecompany.com. As a result, we find it impossible to remove them.

Interesting how people behave in e-mail in a different manner than they would in person."

* * *

Reader Kirk Talbot noted, “Years ago I had a friend in telephone direct marketing and they had to have a system in place to recognize people and numbers that had requested not to be
contacted. I'd be afraid of such a system on the internet because I believe it would only be used as a source for e-mail addresses. I managed to go from about ten junk letters a week to 30+ a day by sending complaints to providers from which I had received spam. Nonetheless, I have to disagree with you: with spam I think you have to shoot first and then correct the few mistakes you might make. . . . Why don't I see options on preventing mass mailings or lists in sendmail? If junk e-mailers were only able to send 10-100 e-mails out from an account at a time, there would be a lot less spam."

*M. E. Kabay adds:* CompuServe limits every message to a maximum of 50 recipients, thus requiring manual intervention to reach more people with a message. It's a bit of a nuisance when I need to reach several hundred people, but I have never complained about the few extra minutes required because this limitation severely limits the usability of CompuServe for outgoing spam. On another tack, if ISPs were able or willing to check e-mail headers for forgery, most spam would disappear. In my experience, almost all junk e-mail uses falsified headers. Now mind you, checking every single e-mail header by verifying the correspondence between numerical IP addresses recorded by SMTP and the written-out domain names would likely put an enormous load on the WHOIS services of domain registrars -- but how satisfying it would be to count the numbers of junk messages disappearing into bit-buckets worldwide! Perhaps the usefulness of filtering out forged e-mail would justify mirroring the registration databases locally with updates sent as required instead of having to perform network-mediated lookups.

ISP and Domain Registrar network managers -- any comments on these ideas for making spamming more difficult?

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M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP is Associate Professor in the Department of Computer Information Systems at Norwich University in Northfield, VT. Mich can be reached by e-mail at <mkabay@compuserve.com>. He invites inquiries about his information security and operations management courses and consulting services. Visit his Web site at <http://www.mekabay.com/index.htm> for papers and course materials on information technology, security and management.

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