Readers Write About Spam (2)

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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 writers contributed additional information that readers may find interesting. This is the second of two columns on this subject.

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John Taylor, a network solutions consultant, wrote, "I read your article (in Network World's 02/21/02 newsletter) with great interest. Another related subject (at least indirectly) is the phenomenon of 'once tainted, always dirty' when it comes to "open relay" reports. ORBZ (particularly, but not exclusively) seems to carry a grudge forever against providers who have once been tarred with the open relay brush, and it must be nearly impossible -- or at least not worth the trouble -- for the providers to get the scarlet letter removed.

Then, as companies and networks tighten their security firewalls, if they use ORBZ or similar services they must take, on faith alone, the validity of the database of bad actors that such services provide. If the situation is never corrected -- and often it is not -- it usually falls on the receiver to enter exceptions for specific addresses, or to make other accommodations.

This all seems to me to be placing a needless burden on the source and destination entities, while totally ignoring the true bottleneck in between, probably because it is so difficult to effect a remedy.

Just for the record, I believe the only solution to spam lies in individual action. For small-scale nuisances, the 'delete' key works nicely. For repetitive aggravations, mail filters are helpful. Granted, there are some bad actors out there, but all in all I prefer the individual bad actors to those bureaucratic entities that would regulate me from afar."

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Gord Belsey of The Amador Group in Canada told of an e-mail storm caused by spam:

"I had an interesting experience recently with spam. I received spam advertisement, which had been sent to a mailing list that included my e-mail address. The e-mail had the same list set as the reply-to address. Moments later, the spammer sent a message infected by an e-mail virus, which of course was shared with the entire list. In the next few minutes there was a flurry of e-mails from mail servers all over the planet responding with a "your e-mail contains a virus" message. Because of the reply-to address, these messages were sent to the entire list. Next came the flurry of angry responses. Over and over again, people replied with nasty responses (most of them fully signed with name, title, company and so on) which of course were also sent to the entire list of recipients. This was followed by a flurry of nasty responses to the nasty responses. It was getting ridiculous, so I finally sent a quick news flash to the mail list. I pointed out that responses went to the entire list rather than the spammer, and that all the nasty things being said
in the response was read by millions (inaccurate, but made my point) of innocent people who were likewise spammed. The noise finally subsided, but not before some joker responded to list by advertising his own services for specific products! No kidding! I sent an offline e-mail pointing out that he, too, was spamming. A quick e-mail argument ensued. Anyway, in the end his ISP convinced him that he was in fact a spammer. He ended the last e-mail with an apology and a 'hope we can do business' sign off. Ever the salesman, huh?"

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