Spammers have never shown any signs of moral development, but many of them have benefited from the technical intelligence of corrupt geeks who support their nefarious activities. Now, when I write about Bad Things, I anonymize the details and usually avoid making overtly derogatory comments in print; however, where spammers are concerned, the gloves come off. So here – without names or contact details but with lots of insulting comments – is the story.

* * *

Recently I received a press release from Caroline Twit of Famous Instrument Company and her fellow conspirator Jason Clueless of Dimwit and Foggy, presumably a firm of professional spam-advisors. Including URLs, it included over 15,998 bytes of fascinating detail about . . . guitars. Why they sent this information to a professor of information assurance is beyond me – except for guessing that they really do not care a whit about selectivity or are too incompetent to bother screening their lists of victims.

The significant issue for readers of this newsletter is their instructions for removal from their list:

Remove me from this list <mailto:removeme-famous@mail.dimwit.com>

(Clicking on the link above will send an email automatically removing you from our distribution list) <

Well, no, it won't – at least not for me, and probably not for lots of other people either.

Now first of all, I don't make a habit of using remove-me instructions on spam; however, when it comes from established companies, I sometimes guess that some creep has suggested spamming to a fool who doesn't know any better, and so the instructions may actually work. Unfortunately, replying from the account where I send e-mail won't remove the address which received the spam.

I redirect mail from by norwich.edu address to an address at gmail.com because my University account is secured so firmly that it is inconvenient to use it from a non-University computer (such as my home-office machine) or from a non-Norwich connection point without using a Web-browser interface instead of a POP-mail client. In addition, I send mail from the home office via my satellite provider, Starband.

So I receive mail that's sent to a norwich.edu address but reply from either a norwich.edu address, a starband.net address or a gmail.com address depending on where I am.

The only way I could unsubscribe from the Famous Instrument spam list is to log on to the
Norwich server using its wretchedly slow Web interface and send the idiots e-mail from there.

But in general, I suspect that some people may be unaware that replying to redirected e-mail won't work when trying to unsubscribe from a list that uses the original address.

If spammers DID care about removal, I suppose they would include instructions such as "If you are replying from an address other than the one we used for our intrusive and unwanted rubbish, use the text < REMOVE address > where address is the one where you received our garbage." Another technique used by legitimate organizations is a uniquely-generated HTML address such as “To be removed automatically, click on < http://www.garbage senders.com/t/56842/800545/41/0/ >” which in turn accesses a database and generates a removal.

Oh well, instead, I wrote them a nasty note.

As an additional cause for finger-pointing and public humiliation, these people didn't use a "mailto:" link for their e-mail addresses. Oh no, they used links in the form

http://us.fnnn.mail.yahoo.com/ym/Compose?To=idiot@unfortunate_employer.com

Anyone allowing HTML-formatted e-mail to pollute their in-box who simply clicks on the link ends up at a page that reads "Your login session has expired."

[Slaps forehead in amazement.]

There. I hope this is sufficiently embarrassing that these folks recognize themselves and NEVER NEVER NEVER spam anyone again.

[Evil grin.]

So the moral for all you nice readers who run legitimate e-mail lists is that you should not make assumptions about where your readers are writing from. When you provide removal instructions, be sure that they will work even if the senders are responding from an e-mail address other than the one to which you sent the original message.

And may there be a pox on spammers throughout the universe.

* * *


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