

How to Minimize Spam and Virus Attacks

You expressed concerns about increasing spam or viruses on your email accounts. This is a very common problem and there are a number of solutions.

Spam

First, realize that there is no "solution" which can eliminate all spam. This is because there is no perfect way to determine if a given email is spam or a desirable email. Spammers change their email headers, domain of origin, and all other source flags daily and sometimes hourly.

A number of "bulk email" systems like Hotmail and Yahoo have extensive spamming and virus checkers. We have found that in many cases these accounts can no longer receive most legitimate email. This is not a good solution for a business.

Undeliverable...

One of the side effects of the way spammers operate is to "spoo" email domain addresses when they send out their spam runs. As a result you end up getting the "undeliverable" notices. You can discover the "real" source by examining the email headers, but few people ever do or even know they can.

Does this make me look like a spammer?

Not really, most of us know that this is happening and unfortunately the only way to avoid this is to HAVE NO DOMAIN AT ALL. This is not a very good solution. Your domain is publicly listed and you need that in order to do business, but because of that fact anyone can "spoo" your domain and create false addresses to use in their spamming attacks.

What SonicSpider advises is a list of best practices for minimizing spam:

1. Accept that a certain amount of spam is going to get through any system that also lets legitimate mail through.
2. If you use WebMail?, turn on the basic spamming filter. This only affects viewing your mail through WebMail? and you can risk not seeing legitimate email.
3. If you use an email client: select an email client that has "Junk Mail" filters. Thunderbird (from Mozilla.com) is such an email client. It has extensive "trainable" junk (spam) filters that you can teach the system what YOU consider junk mail. Everytime you download your email it scans all emails for what YOU consider junk mail.
4. Have several email accounts and carefully guard how you use those accounts on the Internet. Those accounts that are used most when entering email addresses on web forms will have the most spam.
5. Hide all email accounts on your webpages and use form-based "contact" or information requests.

6. Accept that a certain amount of spam is going to get through any system that also will let legitimate mail through. (Repeat of #1).

Viruses

Viruses in email have become increasingly common over the last few years. There are three basic issues that allow about 95% of the email viruses onto your machine:

1. Auto execute of JavaScript? or VBScript attached to an email.
2. Clicking a link on an email that "appears" to be a legitimate vendor.
3. Displaying of images in an email.

The solution to avoiding 95% of email viruses is to avoid these three situations. How does one do that???

1. Turn off all script executions for your emails (Usually found in Internet Options/Security or Preferences/Security)
2. NEVER CLICK A LINK IN AN EMAIL unless it is from an expected and known source.
3. Turn off Image display for all emails.

The next biggest problem is the email client itself. Here are some suggestions:

1. The older Outlook and Outlook Express email clients did not have ANY security features. If you want to use Outlook you should contact a reliable technical company to review your settings and insure that you have your email client configured in the most secure fashion.
2. You might consider upgrading to a better, more security-oriented email client. Thunderbird from Mozilla.com is currently SonicSpider's best recommendation.
3. Install a virus checker and KEEP IT UP TO DATE! This may seem like the simplest solution, but there are a number of problems with this solution:
 1. It can slow down your machine
 2. It can create new problems and incompatibilities.
 3. It can create a false sense of security.
4. Train yourself and your employees who use company machines to be extra careful handling emails. Virus makers are very clever and will use "social engineering" to get you or your employees to "click that link" and download their virus. Be skeptical at all times!

SonicSpider hopes these suggestions will help you continue to use your email systems safely and with minimal hassle and interruption.

Call us if you have any further questions. If we don't have the answer, we will find someone who does and direct you to that source.

SonicSpider Technical Staff