Finally a new Rant..

Contributed by Jonathan Haase
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Yes, that's right after doing the absolute best job of breaking a new
year's resolution I've ever seen, I'm finally getting a chance to come
back and whip out a new rant. I know it's been some time since I've
gotten one on here. In fact I've only done about three all year long.
About the only excuse I can offer is that I just haven't done them.
There have been a few opportunities when I would have had the time to
get it done, and I just didn't do it. In any case I don't know that
even this rant will be much of a coherent stick to one subject kind of
rant as much as just a series of ramblings, but on with the rant.

I know that I've already done a rant on "Spam" but given this issues
that I've been facing at work this week I just have to bring this up
again. Spammer's suck. At the ISP where I work our email servers
process just a little more than 1.5Million emails a day. From some of
the data that we can gather from our mail servers I can guarantee you
that at least 60% of that is "undeliverable" spam. In other words what
happens is that Spammers will often just try random email addresses at
a domain, just throwing out common names, and usernames and appending
the @yourdomain.com on the end of them. 60% of all the messages our
mail servers deal with every day is sent in these types of spam
attempts, to users who don't even exist on our system.

The of the 40% of the mail that we receive on a daily basis that is
"deliverable" while I don't have solid numbers I'd be willing to bet
that at least 25% of that is Spam, just based on my own experience. My
work account admittedly probably receives more spam than the average
user just because of some of the mailing lists and such that I have to
subscribe to in order to keep up to date on things, providing one more
place for spammers to harvest addresses. However on an average day my
work email account gets probably 300-350 emails. Of these emails
200-250 are caught by our spam filtering software and immediately
tagged as spam. Of those I have maybe 1-2 emails in a month that get
tagged as spam incorrectly, so you can basically consider all of those
200-250 messages per day Spam. In the remaining 100-150 email messages
I receive per day, there are probably 10-15 or so which are actually
spam but the spammers are getting smart enough to get around most spam
filters, so they slipped through. Leaving me with about 85-130 actual
valid emails a day, most of which are from one security mailing list or
another.

So taking the highest amount of good email and the lowest amount of
total email, 57% of the email I get on a daily basis is Spam. On a side
note if you look at the total amount of spam I get on a daily basis
verses what is caught by our spam filtering software, it actually
properly tags between 90% and 97% of spam, usually trending towards
that higher end of things, with about .05% false positives. That's
actually doing pretty good industry wide for spam filtering. Even so
Spam is an overwhelming problem, that really needs some attention.

Unfortunately from a legal standpoint what can we do about it. Many
different states and even the Federal government are toying with

various ideas about outlawing spam, but will any of their ideas work? Doubtful at best. At their very best most of the new anti-Spam laws currently proposed would manage to catch some "casual spammers", who are sending out low volumes of spam and put them out of business. At the other end of the spectrum it can be a nightmare situation for an ISP to maintain and parse through the records that some of these anti-spam laws would require. The spam and anti-spam problems have been further muddied by the advent of several different computer viruses that have come out lately which turn your computer into an "open relay" for spammers to send spam through. This makes it virtually impossible to track some spammers down.

As an example, without getting into specifics, I know of at least one case at the ISP I work for where a little old lady, who barely knew how to get on the Internet, much less send spam, got her computer infected by one of those computer viruses. So by these anti-spam laws, does that make her responsible for sending out spam. After-all by any logs that we as an ISP can track back the Spam originated with her computer. These computer viruses unfortunately don't leave you with much if any means to track the spam back to it's actual source. In fact more an more spam is being sent out this way, using unsuspecting users computers for sending their trash.

AT&T recently got slammed in the media for their attempt at controlling the problem, they were going to implement a "white list" of acceptable email hosts, and only allow those mail servers to send mail to their corporate offices. This backfired on them when many of the companies and ISP with which they daily do business refused to provide them the information necessary to accomplish this feat.

Someday we might find an effective solution to stop Spam once and for all. Unfortunately I think this is probably a long time coming, as overall until we can get the 1% of the population who actually responds to the spam, and buys whatever the spammer is selling, to stop making it profitable for spammers, the spam will keep right on rolling in. As long as their is money to made in spamming, someone will keep doing it.

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