

welcome



Junk emails are waging war on all our inboxes. And as long as people keep a-clicking spammers will keep a-spamming, finding ways round the wildest software filters and jumping through even the tightest legal loopholes

One word has dominated the computer business this month: spam, aka unsolicited email, aka junk mail. Security vendors estimate that this year 30 percent of all emails sent will be spam and that this will rise to more than half in a couple of years. But then they would say that, because it will sell more antispyware software.

Anyone who has ever had a Hotmail account will know about spam. Sign up one day and the next day the inbox floods with offers of mortgages, insurance, car loans, debt relief, hand relief, breast enlargement, penis enlargement, straight porn, gay porn, bi porn, animal porn, extra-terrestrial porn and deals on a new PC.

The Department of Trade & Industry, the Department of Justice, the European Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, Yahoo, AOL and Microsoft have all vowed to ban, fight and otherwise eradicate spam.

But spam can be useful, depending on how you define it. For example, you didn't ask to see the ad next to this page, so according to an extreme definition it's an unsolicited marketing message. But it might be a product you are interested in, something you want. Would you have known you were interested if you hadn't seen the ad?

People respond to ads, reply to direct mail and click on links in spam. Response rates for spam are woefully low – 0.04 percent compared to between one and five percent for direct mail. But if you send out five million emails, an 0.04 percent response rate is 2,000 prospective customers.

Everyday *PC Advisor* receives a press release (an unsolicited email, ironically) from a security vendor that claims it has the answer to eliminating spam. We don't believe it.

No legal or technological solution will ever eradicate spam entirely in a capitalist system. Not while people can still send direct mail to our homes and business addresses or phone us up to sell double glazing. "Your windows are already double-glazed, sir? Have you considered a conservatory?"

While the battle to unclog the arteries of electronic communication is laudable, we have to face reality. There will never be a burglar-proof house just like there will never be a virus-free internet. And there will certainly never be a spam-free world. ■

Andrew Charlesworth, editor

reader information

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April competition winners

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