

Stop That Spam

Here are some tips to help prevent those annoying, unsolicited emails that we receive every day:

10. Never, ever bite.

You should never respond to spam. Why? Well, if you do, you're simply letting the advertiser know that you are a prime target for even more spam. Advertisers who send spam in text format have no way of knowing whether or not you open and read their messages, unless you actually respond.

9. Unsubscribe with caution.

You'll often find details about how to remove your name from a mailing list in the body of an e-mail message. This can involve replying to the sender with "unsubscribe" in the subject line or going to a Web site. The genuine marketers will usually honor your request and take your name off their mailing lists. In that case, you'll be happy to see the end of some junk e-mail. However, in the case of illicit spam, when you try to unsubscribe, you simply end up confirming your e-mail address. If anything, you're likely to wind up on more spammers' lists of valid accounts. Don't be surprised if you get pelted with more unsolicited mail after that. So use your judgment. Think twice before pursuing the "remove" option.

8. The real Slim Shady.

If you can handle maintaining multiple e-mail accounts—and remembering new passwords—you might consider using extra addresses to keep spam out of your main in-box (more on this in Nom de Spam below). In general, most ISPs include five to seven free e-mail accounts with their basic service. Just sign up for extra addresses at your ISP's Web site, then tell your e-mail program to download the mail in all of your accounts at once.

7. Nom de spam.

If you decide to use extra addresses, that means you can keep your main address—the one you check several times each day and use for important correspondence—almost completely spam-free. Keep it close to the vest, sharing it only with people you know, such as friends, business associates, and your family.

6. Variety is the spicy ham of life.

If the spam in your in-box is out of control, and it's really getting you down, think about starting afresh with a brand new e-mail address.

5. Names and numbers.

Whether you're setting up a new e-mail account to be your main address or just a repository for newsletters, you can sometimes reduce spam if your e-mail address has a combination of letters and numbers. Take, for example, "your777name@aol.com." Adding numbers to your address—preferably between your first name and last name—can sometimes foil spammers who use auto-generators to try to guess every combination of common names, like "Jim," "Jimmy," "James," "Jamie," "JimWelp101," "JimWelp102," and so on.

4. If you can't beat it, eat it.

Set up an address exclusively for spam. It sounds crazy at first, but there are some very fun and worthwhile activities online that are, unfortunately, total spam magnets—such as discussion boards. If you set up an address just for spam, you can then give out that address—instead of your main address—any time you expect spam to follow.

Use it when you register at Web sites, enter a chat room, or post messages to discussion lists or newsgroups. If you faithfully keep this address just for junk mail, you'll only have to check the mail there occasionally, to delete all the spam (with glee).

3. Filter and organize.

Now that you've got your slew of addresses set up, you need a system to manage them.

2. Snitch therapy.

For most people, spam is mildly annoying, but to ISPs and network administrators, it's a major problem. All that spam hogs a tremendous amount of bandwidth, hardware resources,

and labor hours. If you'd like to help stop spam at its source, you can take action in various ways. Before you do anything else, report spammers to your ISP.

1. Don't let spam get you down.

Stop for a moment and take a deep breath. Perhaps the single best way to deal with spam is to put it in perspective. By its nature, e-mail feels deeply personal; it's intrusive and irritating to get junk mail in your in-box. But how many pieces of spam do you get each day, anyway? Is it really so terrible?

When you compare spam with telemarketing, AM radio ads, junk postal mail, newspaper advertising, and TV advertising, e-mail spam seems less invasive. It doesn't require killing trees, you don't have to sit patiently while it screams at you until West Wing comes back on, and it doesn't interrupt your dinner. When it comes right down to it, spam probably isn't worth getting your blood pressure up.