

Unit 10

Internet Issues

How Spam works

Spam is a term used to describe unsolicited e-mail sent to you, often by commercial firms that attempt to sell you goods and services. Spam is sent out as bulk e-mail, often to lists of 10000 or more people at once. It is inexpensive to send so its use has exploded on the Internet to the point where it is common for someone to get several dozens of these in a single day, Spam has become enough of an annoyance to warrant calls to ban it outright.

In order to send out unsolicited bulk e-mail, a spammer first needs to get a list of e-mail addresses. Often, spammers buy the list from companies that compile the lists. These companies use automated software robots to get the email addresses, the robots get the lists from a number of sources. One way is to get into Usenet newsgroups and "harvest" e-mail addresses by looking inside every message, which usually has in it the e-mail address of the person who posted it.

E-mail addresses can also be harvested from e-mail directories on the Websites that allow people to look up others' email addresses. Software robots can go into the directory and grab every address in the directory. Robots also can go into chat areas, such as those on America Online and gather e-mail addresses.

The spammer uses the list, along with bulk mailing software, and sends a spam message to every person on the list. In the message there may be a return address, Website, or phone number where someone can get more information about the goods and services being sold.

Some spammers will include in the e-mail a return address where someone who no longer wants to receive spam can send a message and be taken off the spam list. When the remove message is received, a robot automatically takes the person off the list. However, spammers rarely do this because most people would opt not to be on the spam lists.

Spammers realize that spam offends most people so the spammers go to great lengths to hide their true e-mail addresses. As one way of hiding their real e-mail addresses, they "forge" parts of the message header in the e-mail address such as the " From", " Sender", and " Reply " fields so that it appears that the e-mail has come from someone other than the spammers.

As a further way of hiding their true addresses, spammers "relay" their bulk spam to a sever that is not associated with them and then have that server send out the bulk spam. Sometin1es spammers have the bulk spam relayed among several different servers to make it even more difficult to trace who really sent the mail.