



IT Tips and Tricks #9

"Spam, Spam, Spam..." sang the Vikings in Monty Python's famous sketch and, whilst at the time it seemed funny, the electronic version seems to be on an increase at the moment, becoming less funny with each email offering Viagra, Holidays or extensions to various bits of your anatomy (whether you have them or not!) that you have to delete. So how can we try to reduce the amount of Spam that we receive?

Keep your details to yourself

Being careful who you give your e-mail address to can stop the spammers before they start:

- Create an alternative e-mail address for public interactions - Set up a second e-mail address to use when participating in online forums, registering with Web sites, entering contests, or filling out forms on the Internet. Share your primary e-mail address only with people you know
- Keep your primary e-mail address private - Do not allow your e-mail address to be listed in online member directories
- Review a Web site's privacy policy before doing business online - Some sites will automatically assume the right to share your e-mail address with other organisations. Responsible sites will offer you a way to opt out
- Ignore spam. Spammers often combine names randomly with popular e-mail services (for example, MSN® Hotmail®, AOL, and Yahoo!) in hopes of finding valid e-mail addresses. By responding to the junk e-mail you may be inadvertently verifying that the message has reached a working e-mail address
- Don't believe that part of the message which tells you that by "clicking here" you will be removed from their register, again, you will just confirm that your email address exists and generate more Spam for yourself!

Use technology to help block junk e-mail

- Set up filters that assist in blocking junk e-mail within your own email programme
- Considering installing some mail-blocking software either on your own pc or between you and your email server, for example...
 - **On your own computer.** You could try a free program called **Mailwasher** (<http://www.mailwasher.net>). This checks your mail at set intervals and removes any spam directly from your mailbox on the mail server before it reaches your computer. An alternative is **POPFile** (<http://popfile.sourceforge.net>) that sits between your e-mail program and your provider's POP server. You'll need to teach it which mails should be treated as spam but after a short learning period, this tool is very effective.
 - **On the mail server.** Due to the time spent configuring anti-spam tools, this method has its advantages. It's an anti-spam tool that sits on a remote server and will filter any spam for you. This avoids the problem of having to download all your messages onto your computer to examine them first - a particular nuisance on a dial-up connection. So try MailShell via the following link (<http://www.mailshell.com/mail/client/join.html?simple=!&free=1>). It requires no software and you can set the strength of the spam filters as well as creating your own rules. You can sign up for a free one-month trial after which you pay around £22 per year.

And finally, for those of you who want to relive the original sketch, the following link will take you there...
<http://www.detritus.org/spam/skit.html> (you can even re-listen to the sketch!)