

Computer Hysteria: The Sentence

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I was terrified as I faced the Judge of the Spammers' Court awaiting my sentence. The Judge began reviewing my case. "You have been charged with sadistically deleting spam but reading 'ham'. Spam is described as unsolicited (usually commercial, usually unwanted) e-mail messages. 'Ham' is described as real e-mail messages. You are charged with a capital crime, spamocide in the first degree! Since your plea is not guilty, I will review your case."

The defendant's brief contains some material available from CAUCE, The Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial E-mail which is an ad hoc, all volunteer organization, created by Netizens to advocate for a legislative solution to the problem of UCE (a/k/a "spam"). UCE is the leading complaint of Internet users. But junk e-mail is more than just annoying, it costs Internet users and Internet based businesses billions per year. Junk e-mail is 'postage due' marketing; it is like a telemarketer calling you collect. The economics of junk e-mail encourages massive abuse and because junk e-mailers can get into business very cheaply. The volume of junk e-mail is increasing every day."

Vint Cerf, Senior Vice President, MCI and acknowledged "Father of the Internet" is quoted by permission "Spamming is the scourge of electronic mail and newsgroups on the Internet." It can seriously interfere with the operation of public services, to say nothing of the effect it may have on any individual's e-mail mail system ... Spammers are in effect, taking resources away from users and service suppliers without compensation and without authorization."

In 2002, Paul Graham discussed in a paper, "a Plan for Spam" developing Bayesian spam filtering to distinguish between illegitimate spam e-mail from legitimate "ham" e-mail. Many modern mail programs such as Mozilla Thunderbird utilize Bayesian spam filtering. Server-side email filters such as spamassassin and ASSP, make use of Bayesian spam filtering techniques, and the functionality is sometimes embedded within the mail server software itself.

While there has been some excellent anti-spam software written, the increasing volume of spam clearly demonstrates the survival adaptability of the spammers. CAUCE indicates that very few legitimate marketers use spam. Spam takes a variety of forms, like chain letters, get rich quick schemes, quack health remedies, porno related products, pyramid marketing, pirated software (Warez), and many more too numerous to mention which can loosely just be called various scams. There are various techniques to get your e-mail address to be placed on a spam list. One that is very common is the offer of free software. In my opinion, deletion is the "ounce of prevention that provides a pound of cure." However, we are losing the war on spam; you may want to join CAUCE's efforts to get legislation to stamp out spammers. If you want to join other Netizens to support the efforts of CAUCE, visit the website for more information at www.cauce.org.

The Judge at the Spammers' Court banged his gavel and pronounced my sentence. You have been found guilty of spamocide in the first degree! I remand you into custody of the processors at the Spammers' Cannery. I shouted at the Judge in the same spirit of Patrick Henry, "If I must be canned, then can me ham NOT spam!"

Thank goodness it was only a dream; I awoke looking at my e-mail client when I had obviously dozed off while deleting spam. However, this article must now end because I have a strange craving for a "ham" sandwich!

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