

FAST FACTS 28: WHAT IS SPAM?

Spam is the sending of unsolicited commercial electronic messages, which includes e-mail, instant messaging and SMS. Fax and voice telemarketing are not forms of spam.

Spam has recently become a major problem on the global e-mail network, accounting for more than 50 per cent of all e-mail traffic on the internet.

There is a significant impact on business, with concerns being:

- financial
- time wasted by employees deleting spam
- IT resources employed trying to block spam and the threat of viruses
- the content is often offensive or fraudulent
- the manner in which e-mail addresses have been collected

Spam legislation

To help curb this rising, annoying and costly trend, the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) has introduced new legislation, the *Spam Act 2003*, which commenced on 10 April 2004.

The new legislation prohibits:

- unsolicited commercial electronic messages with an Australian link
- supply or use of address-harvesting software
- harvesting e-mail lists for the purposes of sending spam

The Act also requires that all commercial electronic messages include accurate sender information and a functional 'unsubscribe' facility.

As most spam comes from overseas, the Australian Government has called for international cooperation and is currently working with other countries to develop a multilateral approach to spam.

If you are a business sending commercial e-mails, SMS or instant messaging you must ensure:

- you have consent from the recipients
- accurate sender information is included
- e-mails you send have a functional unsubscribe facility

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Reducing spam being received

The following are some ways of reducing the amount of spam you receive:

- Be careful when giving out your e-mail address. Consider using a separate e-mail address when signing up for newsgroups, chat rooms, websites etc. Reserve your main e-mail address for personal messages.
- Check whether you are giving permission to use your details for other purposes (the Federal Privacy Commissioner provides advice on protecting your privacy – www.privacy.com.au)
- Use a filter service – the Internet Industry Association has a list of providers – www.security.iiia.net.au
- Improve your computer's security. Install a firewall – download security patches. Your computer may be used by spammers to send out spam, without your knowledge, if it is infiltrated by a virus.
- Don't reply to emails from unknown sources – don't click their unsubscribe facility. Often spammers just wish to confirm that your email address is a real address. Once you subscribe, you will receive many more emails from that spammer and from others to whom they will sell your email address.
- Be aware that the content of much spam is fraudulent. For more details of how to recognise scams, visit Scamwatch – www.scamwatch.gov.au
- Report spam from Australian sources to your internet service provider

To view the *Spam Act 2003* visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority website – www.acma.gov.au

For more information refer to other Fast Facts in this series or contact:

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