Avoiding SPAM

The curse of getting SPAM email has been discussed several times at PCC malware and internet hygiene tutorials over the years. A recent tutorial highlighted that there are still people getting spam albeit in much smaller numbers.

This guide has been put together to give you help you check that you are doing all you can to avoid getting spam, and if you are getting spam how you can get rid of it..

What and Why SPAM
Spam is mostly unsolicited junk email sent to your personal inbox. Spam can be annoying as it tends to be targeted incorrectly and arrives constantly.

For the most part spam email is used to get you to buy something by visiting a website, or make a donation to someone or some organisation you don't know (probably fake).

SPAMMERS (the people who send the spam email) hope you'll make a purchase from the website they've asked you to go to as they'll get a percentage of proceeds. They may get 1% of the £10 item you just bought. Alternatively a spammer may be paid by the number of people they can get to visit a website; in this case they may get 0.01p per visitor.

To give you an example of how much these spammers can make consider this; over 10 trillion email messages were sent around the world in 2003. It is estimated that upto 45% of this was spam and if the spammers made 0.01p per message then they made 45 million pounds from us!

SPAM is invasive, annoying and only serves others.

5 steps to avoid getting SPAM

1. Don't give out your email address out to everyone! be selective.

    It might sound silly but giving out your email address to anyone leads to them passing it on, or perhaps getting it harvested because their system is not protected by a virus scanner or firewall.

2. Your email address is on a website in plain text (ie. send feedback to: billsmith@yahoo.com)

   A spammer will easily capture this information and use/sell it.

3. You've had a virus in the past that harvest's email addresses you're your Outlook/Outlook Express inbox.

4. Your email address is easy to generate or workout (ie. lisa@yahoo.com or jonsmith@aol.com)

   If your name does not have a unique spelling and is simple to guess, then it's easy for the spammer to target. Email sent to the addresses above is going to arrive in someone's inbox, so is billsmith@aol.com or billsmith@msn.co.uk.

4 steps to stop or minimise SPAM

1. Use a SPAM "filter" on your webmail or Outlook/Thunderbird email software

   Both Yahoo, AOL and others have this facility. Turn it on, it does work (and it's typically free!). See Yahoo's below.
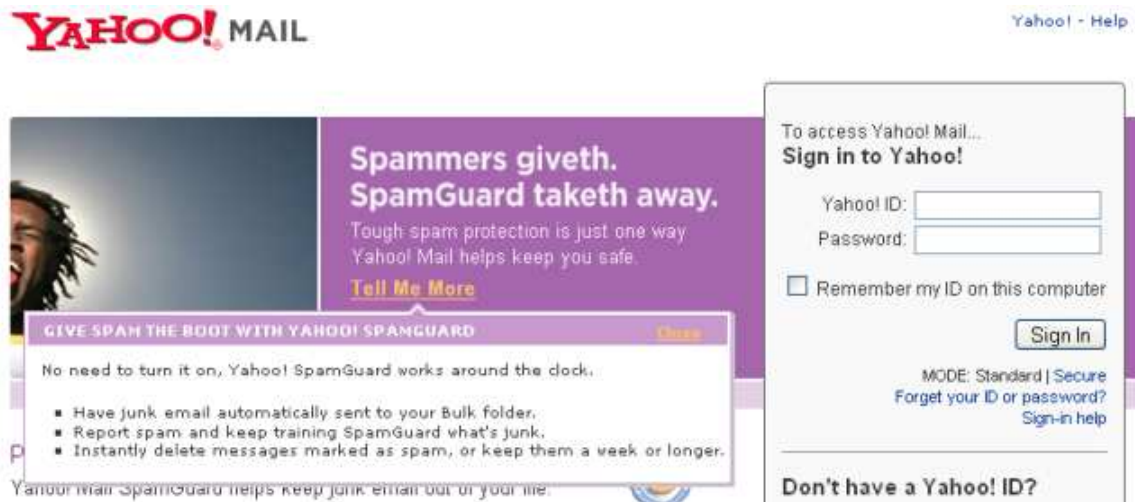
2. Change your email address and be selective as to who you give it out to in future.

   Sound silly but will cut down the amount of SPAM you will get. Make sure your friends and family protect themselves when using their PC connected to the Internet via broadband or dial-up.

3. Ensure your virus and firewall software is up to date.

   If you have a good firewall and virus scanner installed this should be an automatic task (unless configured otherwise). Remember if you are on dial-up you might not be updating as often as you should (once per week), also it might not complete before you log-off.

4. Use a domain name to take control if spam arrives.

Spam is virtually impossible to know where it "really" came from, and you want to know this information so you can get them to stop sending you unwanted email. Using a domain name and a free webmail/isp account with spam protection you can cut down on the amount of spam you get and also know where exactly the spam is coming from.

Both Jim and I (Stuart) do this; it costs us less than £5 (less than 5p per week) for 2 years. Setup ad use is simple and we'd be happy to explain this in more detail if you are interested, ask at the start of an evening tutorial or in the PCC forum.