Dealing With Spam

It's annoying, intrusive, and unwanted. "Unsubscribing" won't stop it. Here are some tips that will help you deal with spam in your Inbox.

In a famous 1970 sketch from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, Viking customers in a café discover that every item on the menu contains Spam – Hormel's enigmatic ham+pork+etc. food-like substance introduced in 1937. They began to chant "Spam, spam, spam, spam…," overwhelming all normal conversation.

Early 1990s internet bulletin board users were looking for a word to describe messages that were repetitive, unwanted, and that drowned out real discussion, and – harking back to the *Flying Circus* days– adopted the term "spam" to describe junk email that clogs our Inbox.

When the internet was commercialized in the mid-1990s, spam email quickly became rampant. And it's been rampanting[1] every since.

How Email Systems Detect Spam

You may not believe it, but email providers use spam detectors to filter your incoming email stream. These detectors look for key phrases, such as "Make $5000/Week in Gefilte Fish Futures" or "Kiss Your Hemorrhoids Goodbye." They also look for strange punctuation, odd font use, and emails originating from known spam sites.

Susan's spam filter is somewhat weak.

Many email providers also learn from you – noting when you mark emails as "spam" or "junk" or deleting unread emails from certain senders. Of course, this isn't perfect. Some legitimate emails get unceremoniously tagged as spam and cast into your "junk" mailbox, and some spam sneaks through.

Spam "Don'ts"

Don't Open the Spam Email. While simply opening an email isn't inherently dangerous, spammers may be able to tell that you're reading their spam. It's best to mark the email as junk and delete it. But if you open it…

Don't unsubscribe. That tells the spam sender that you are reading their emails, and the "Unsubscribe" button may be a link to a nefarious website. You can, of course, unsubscribe from emails associated with an account you set up or software you installed.

Don't Click on Embedded Pictures or Graphics. Spammers can also tell you're reading their emails when you click on embedded pictures or other graphics. Many email programs won't load those graphics for this reason.

Filter Your Email

Some email services and applications (e.g., Apple Mail and Outlook) allow you to filter specific emails into a Junk folder or Trash. I filter mail from "Joke of the Day" and "National Circus" directly to Trash because that's the only way I can deal with them.

Unfortunately, spam is a part of the internet landscape. It's sort of like kudzu. The best we can do is keep it trimmed.

If you need help with your email, just click "Tech Help" at the bottom of our website's home page or request help from our tech team at: **https://engage.cmaprinceton.org/tech-help**.

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1   This isn't a word. It should be.