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Conquest Wildman

TECHNICAL GUIDE No. 2

Junk mail can be a real nuisance for staff who read and delete unwanted e-mails on a daily basis. The volumes are constantly on the increase and some e-mail users now receive more junk than useful mail. This is not only a waste of time but legitimate mail can be accidentally deleted too.

Apart from the annoyance it causes, there are also more serious consequences of junk email. As well as clogging up your companies mailserver, it is also having a detrimental effect on the whole of the internet and it is a problem that if ignored, is only going to get worse.

We all know that by replying to or sending requests to unsubscribe from unwanted mailing lists, we stand a very good chance of actually increasing the amount of junk email we receive, rather than reducing it! So what steps can we take to ensure that problems caused by junk email do not keep getting worse and worse?

The most effective way to manage junk email responsibly is to implement a solution which includes the use of effective junk mail management software, combined with precautionary steps to prevent your email address getting onto junk mail lists in the first place. In addition to this, if you select a solution that reports internet abuse back to the relevant authorities on your behalf then you will be helping to control what could, if left, be a very serious future problem for internet mail. These systems cost relatively little and are easy to implement. If you would like further information about software solutions then please contact us for more information, in the meantime there are some steps you can take:

Managing Junk Mail

- **Do not publish email addresses on your company website**

  Instead of publishing your email address on your website consider the use of feedback or contact forms instead. These will allow people to communicate with you just as easily and are not susceptible to the many thousands of email harvesters that automatically scan through millions of websites on the internet harvesting email addresses and adding them to junk mailing lists. If you do need to include your email address on your website, make sure your web designer places your email address on the site as a graphical image, instead of text, this will also prevent web harvesters from obtaining your details.

- **Do not reply or respond to junk email**

  Generally you should not reply to junk email or follow links that allow you to un-subscribe, as many disreputable organisations will simply acknowledge this as a sign that your email address is active and that mail sent to it is being read. There is a possibility that you may be removed from that one list, but the chances are you will be added to many many more!

- **Do not open junk mail**

  Many junk email messages now contain automatic links to websites, and some of these links even contain a unique reference to your email address. By opening these messages, or even clicking your cursor over them to delete them, you will be signalling to the sender that you have received the mail. Some senders even measure how quickly you receive mail they send, as from this they can establish how often you check your email, knowing that the more often you check it, the more value your email address will have to would be sellers.

- **Be sparing with the use of your email address**

  Think twice about using your email address when you open online accounts or make subscriptions online. Check carefully to see if there is a tick box hidden away that allows you to opt out of mailing schemes and make sure that you do not allow organisations to share your email address with other companies.

- **Consider the use of a good junk mail management solution**

  In addition to filtering your incoming mail and removing junk as it comes in, good management software can actually reduce the amount of junk that people send to you by tackling the problem at it's source. If a junk mail sender is abusing the mailing systems of their internet service provider, or other organisations, then it will automatically report the abuse to their system administrators. Some junk mail filters can also automatically report this abuse and send evidence of it to the relevant government organisations and technical institutions responsible for tracking the sources of unsolicited or offensive mail. This can then lead to prosecuting the perpetrators, sending them the evidence they actually need to do this.

- **See if your system will allow you to bounce junk email back to the sender**

  If you simply delete junk email, although the sender cannot be 100% certain you have received it, if it is never actually returned to them as undeliverable, they will have a pretty good idea that it has arrived. Although you have actually received the junk email, some management systems allow the sending of a faked "message undeliverable signal" back to the sender, this indicates that your email address is no longer valid, and will eventually lead to your address being removed from junk mailing lists.

Other facts about junk email

- Almost 50% of all e-mail is estimated to be Spam.
- Predictions show hundreds of billions of junk e-mails will be sent & received by 2006!
- Employers may find themselves legally liable for allowing inappropriate material to be delivered into their staff's mailboxes, especially if the content is obscene or offensive.