

Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

September 2009
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Why do some folks receive a lot of unsolicited commercial e-mail messages that are commonly referred to as "spam"? Well, in many cases it's not understanding what they should do and what they should not do. The first and most important "should not do" is never, never open an e-mail that is tagged as spam or can be identified as spam based on the subject. Almost all spam e-mails have a little program embedded somewhere in the message. If you open the e-mail it's almost 100% certain that a confirmation message will be transmitted back to the spammer to let them know their e-mail was opened. That make the spammer smile and they begin to see dollar signs. First of all there hoping you'll purchase something. If nothing else, they know they have another good e-mail address to add to the "good e-mail list". When they get enough addresses on the "good e-mail list", they can sell the list to another spammer. Once your e-mail address appears on multiple "good e-mail lists" you're going to be inundated with spam. If you accidentally open a spam e-mail, immediately delete it. Never click on anything that appears in a spam message. Your dead wrong if you think can stop spam by clicking on the statement at the bottom of the message that says something like "click here if you do not want to receive any more e-mails". Clicking on that statement will simply let the spammer know that they've found a good e-mail address. Some folks think that if they create an e-mail message rule to block the spammer's address that it will solve the problem. Doing so is a waste of time. Spammers have multiple e-mail addresses and don't use an e-mail address for very long before switching to a new address. Forwarding the spam e-mail back to the spammer is not a good idea either. It will either confirm your e-mail address or add to the clutter of bad e-mail messages being sent back and forth over the Web. In many cases the "From" address that appears in a piece of spam is not a valid e-mail address. If you forward the e-mail it cannot be delivered and some ISP (Internet Service Provider) will have to send you an e-mail to let you know the spammer's e-mail could not be delivered.

Using the Preview Pane in Outlook Express to read your e-mail is the second most important "should not do". With the Preview Pane turned on you cannot delete an e-mail without it being opened. That violates the first "should not do" rule. To turn off the Preview Pane, open Outlook Express, click View on the menu bar, and select Layout. Remove the check mark from the check box to the left of, Show preview pane, and then click the OK button. With the Preview Pane turned off you can delete spam emails without opening them. Just highlight the entry in the Inbox by clicking on it, then click the Delete button on the toolbar or tap the Delete key on the keyboard. This will send the message to the Deleted Items folder without opening the e-mail.

There's one more thing you need to do. When you open Outlook Express and your new e-mail messages appear in the Inbox, the first thing you should do is delete the bad e-mails. Highlight and delete the obvious spam e-mails, the e-mails from an unknown sender, e-mails without a subject, and e-mails with an attachment that you were not expecting. What you have left are the good e-mails that you can now read and not be concerned with accidentally opening a bad e-mail. With the Preview Pane turned off, double-click the entry in the Inbox and the e-mail will open in a new window. If you delete the e-mail you're reading without returning to the Inbox, the next e-mail on the list in the Inbox will open. This is the reason for editing out the bad e-mail before you start reading the new e-mail that arrives when you open the program.

An easy way to control spam in your primary e-mail account is to have multiple e-mail addresses. If you're receiving an unacceptable number of spam e-mails in your primary e-mail account, contact your ISP and obtain a new e-mail address. Yes, you'll need to notify your friends and relatives and give them your new e-mail address. Just remember to use the Bcc (Blind Carbon Copy) box. Reserve this new e-mail address as your personal e-mail address and use it for corresponding with your friends and relatives. Now, go get a couple of free e-mail addresses from MSN (Hotmail), Google (Gmail), or Yahoo (Yahoo Mail). Use these free e-mail addresses for all of the situations where you need to provide an e-mail address. For example, if you make purchases on the Internet use one of the free addresses just for online purchases. Use the second free address for all the web site that wants you to provide an e-mail address to create an account or log on to the site. A Gmail address would be preferable because it can be set up in Outlook Express. Most ISP's offer multiple e-mail addresses at no additional cost so this is another option you could choose. What about all of the businesses and other web sites that have your original e-mail address? You can leave it that way and update your e-mail address as you return to these sites.

Some ISP's and online service providers offer or use spam filtering programs to scan your e-mail messages in an attempt to filter out the spam. Some will delete or block the e-mails that the program thinks are spam while others will route the suspected e-mails to a spam or junk folder. Spam filtering programs are not 100% accurate so you'll need to closely monitor your e-mail and make sure your ISP is not deleting or blocking good e-mail. If e-mails are being routed into a spam or junk folder, you need to open the folder and check for any good e-mails that were placed there by mistake.

Finally, if you think you need a spam filtering program on your computer, there are a number of good program you can purchase or download from the Internet. If you elect to download from the Internet, research the program to make sure it's a safe program (no malware). If you do what has been suggested here, follow good e-mail etiquette, and use common sense, having a spam filtering program on your computer is not an important issue.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor. There has been a significant increase in the number of people taking advantage of this service. If everyone arrives during the first hour there will probably be a wait. We now have three stations for members and one for nonmembers.