

Caught In the Cross-Fire of the Spam War

By Bill Platt

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LET THERE BE LIGHT: To understand this story, we must return to the beginning --- September 5th, 2001. One of my associates had placed a free ad in a newsletter that she had just subscribed to. For that effort, she was accused of spam! Mind you the person filing the complaint was not the editor of the newsletter, but rather a subscriber of the newsletter.

The man was frustrated because he was having difficulty getting unsubscribed from the newsletter, so he filed a complaint against everyone who was listed in the body of the message, rather than just the list owner. It was his frustration, anger and ignorance that fueled this nasty little affair.

My friend lives in a very small town in Canada that has only one ISP. The Upline Provider for the local ISP was demanding her account to be turned off permanently because of this accusation which was later dropped. The local ISP stood their ground on behalf of their customer --- my friend --- though this action could have seriously hampered their ability to provide their customers with Internet access.

Even in dropping his claim against my friend, the person who filed the complaint insisted that my friend was somehow still responsible for his inability to unsubscribe from the newsletter in question!

The person who filed this complaint was using a system designed by programmer Julian Haight to combat spam email called SpamCops.net.

INTO THE PIT: In my original copy written September 10th, I had compared the tactics of the few diehard SpamCop anti-spammers to the tactics of a terrorist.

In the wake of September 11th, it did not seem appropriate to

refer to the SpamCop fanatics as terrorists. However closely the tactics used by the SpamCop fanatics coincides with the tactics used by the al-Qaida terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden, SpamCop does not resort to murder.

Due to SpamCop.net's unwillingness to provide a real person contact for the resolution of complaints, I was forced to turn to their discussion board to find the resolution I was seeking --- a resolution, which by the way, was never found.

My major complaint was that for someone to file against another simply because their email address or website appeared in someone else's ezine was improper.

Many members had knee jerk reactions to my questioning their system from within their inner sanctum. Many resorted to name calling and angry retort until a list administrator called them down. After the list administrator directly addressed their inappropriate comments, I received three open apologies from members of the group.

PUBLISHERS BEWARE. Over the course of the next few days, I watched their discussions. I was appalled to learn that many of them put email addresses in circulation just so that they can torment others with spam accusations.

As an owner of several discussion lists and newsletters, I now make it a standard policy to bar participation in my groups by someone sporting a SpamCop.net email address.

I had tried to observe their group with an open mind, as I too find spam mail to be annoying. I receive nearly 50 pieces a day from four to five people, who send me the same ads day after day. What is really annoying is they send the spam to my autoresponders with a fake address, so I get another 50 messages a day telling me that I used an invalid email address in my autoresponder message. All have spidered my website to get the email addresses.

A SPAMCOP SPEAKS. In all fairness, I was leaning towards a semi-favorable opinion of the SpamCop program until "Jerry" lashed out.

In his message, Jerry told me things which will just make you want to explode in frustration.

He said of the innocent who get caught in the cross-fire of the spam wars: "They should stay home."

He went on to say, "it is far better for thousands of innocents to burn in Hell than one spammer prevail."

And, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way - or lack thereof - is irrelevant. Spammers must believe there are no loopholes, no gray areas, that the righteous will be sacrificed (in vast numbers if need be) in order to expunge the evildoers."

In conclusion, it was stated, "Spam, like the one true faith, is in the eye of the beholder. Again, if it looks like a bird, it might be a duck. Better the condor dies than risk a quack."

These of course are just excerpts. If you would care to read his entire message to me, you may do so at the bottom of this page:

<http://shopmystate.com/niba/BillP.html>

NO SAFE HAVEN: On two occasions, I have found myself squarely in the cross-hairs of the radicals or the angry that wear the shield of SpamCop. I publish articles for free-reprint on the web --- much as this article has come to you today.

The SpamCop's suggested that I was hiding behind the free-reprint rights connected to my articles. They suggested that I was encouraging spam by making my work available to be published by anyone. In response to their suggestions that I am the enemy, I have added one term to my Terms of Reprint:

* You may not use this article in UCE (Unsolicited Commercial Email). Email distribution of this article must be opt-in email only.

Despite this step, I have been accused of spam twice because my article appeared in a newsletter that a complaint was lodged against. In both cases, the SpamCop member did not file a complaint against the person who was responsible for the newsletter --- they filed against everyone who was in the body of the email.

Their complaint was received by the editor of the newsletter, the article writers, the advertisers, and anyone who was fortunate enough to be mentioned in the resources section or the Letters to the Editor. We each had our ISP and Upline Providers contacted if our email address appeared in the body of the newsletter and our webhosts contacted if our domain appeared within the body of the newsletter.

The only way I can completely avoid spam complaints against my domains is to stop writing altogether. I am a writer. That is what writers do, we write. To please the SpamCop's, I must quit

being a writer or just "stay home."

POLICING THE POLICE. This is silly. If we cannot trust the cops to make sure they nab the right person, who can we trust?

There is in fact a movement afoot to bring SpamCop down called "Arresting SpamCop":

<http://www.niba.shopmystate.com/>

While some of the SpamCop members are simply tired of the same kinds of spam that irritates us, there are others within the movement who have an axe to grind with everyone who crosses their path.

To suggest to a SpamCop member that folks should be trained in the nuances of who to complain against in a complaint, you can expect a reply like this. "Jerry" answered my suggestion precisely this way:

"SpamCop users are literate, intelligent, virtually all college educated, well-versed in spam, and are more computer-savvy than 99% of the world's population. It is presumptuous and arrogant in the extreme to imply they need a Learning Annex class to detect spam."

The question I have is to whom the term "arrogant" should be applied?

This is what my webhost said about my last SpamCop spam complaint, "As far as I know spam is generally considered to be high volume unsolicited email. So, as long as you are not doing that then I am not sure why it would be called spam."

CONCLUSION: While the anti-spammers rail on the ugliness of spam, it seems they are perfectly willing and likely prefer that the only people permitted to send email should be those they directly give permission to.

Personally, I find the practices of the radicals of SpamCop to be more offensive than the activities of the spammers. It is a terrible thing to say, I know, but the spammers simply irritate me and the SpamCop fanatics try to oppress my activities.

Osama bin Laden brought external terrorism to the United States on September 11th, 2001. But the truth is that terrorists have long existed in our country on our own soil, and great numbers of them proudly were the shield of SpamCop.

We all must make a choice, do we "stay home" or do we fight the oppressors who seek to diminish our freedom.

For other stories on this subject:

<http://www.niba.shopmystate.com/>

<http://www.smithfam.com/news/june01m.html>

The Realtime Blackhole List (RBL) is even scarier:

----- URL WRAPS -----

<http://unlimited.net.nz/unlimited/unlimited.nsf/ArchiveByDate/>

753E5579AF08A709CC256AC3006ED14B

----- URL WRAPS -----

Resource Box:

Bill Platt is the owner of <http://ThePhantomWriters.com> .

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