

Don't Get Mad

By Bob Osgoodby

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Get Even! In a 24 hour period starting at 10: A.M. this past Tuesday, and ending at the same time on Wednesday, I got 1,734 pieces of spam email. Now these were all unique addresses, and some had 4 or 5 copies.

I have had it with this nonsense. Looking at the email addresses, it was obvious that mine were being harvested from the web. Most of my address are never used to "send" email, are only available on the web, and used to identify specific types of requests.

There is software, similar to the protocol used by the search engines, that allows you to enter keywords, and it will search the web for any web site that matches the keywords entered. It will then capture any email addresses it finds. An example of such software is "Atomic Harvester".

I downloaded this software, which is fully functional in its search capabilities, and is free if that is all you want. You cannot however, save the addresses it finds unless you pay for it. Not wishing to harvest any addresses from the web, I chose the free version, as step one of my devious plan.

Step two was a bit more work. Instead of simply deleting the spam, I created a filter with my email reader that automatically sends all spam identified to my b. I use Eudora, which makes this a rather easy task, but was still time consuming. While this won't provide a "spam free" inbox, it will cut down on the junk one has to wade through. The rest I simply delete, which also goes to the trash bin.

Now, I have all this spam in once place - my trash bin. But wait - I said get even. A good friend of mine is proficient in the "Perl" programming language. He wrote a program that goes into my trash bin, and extracts all of the "From" email addresses it finds. Now I have a file of all the return addresses of anyone who sends me spam.

The majority of the professional spammers use a forged address, which if you respond to it, is returned as undeliverable. Some of the naïve newbies use a legitimate address.

I then put all of the addresses in a file on a web page with an invisible link to it - let's call it the "Trash Page". If you visit my site, you will never see it. But, a spammer using harvesting software will hit that page. They will find each and every address that I loaded onto that page.

Thinking they hit a bonanza, all those unduplicated addresses will be captured by them. Now, two things will happen. First, all the forged addresses on the list that they send to, will be returned to

them as undeliverable, causing them extra work. Second, all the spam received from a legitimate address, will be on the lists of all the spamsters, and they will get their "just deserts".

Eventually, the pros will figure out what I have done, and will block the web page that houses them. But that is not my goal. I started putting those invisible links to that "Trash Page", on a number of my web pages. Now, they can't just block a particular page, but will have to block my entire domain. Great - now I won't have all the addresses on my site being harvested by these miscreants.

If this idea snowballs, and I hope it does, a major percentage of all the email addresses being sold by "email list providers" will be worthless. You might think about this if you are ever tempted to purchase their "thousands of email addresses" for \$49.95.

The spam problem is not going to go away in the foreseeable future. If all webmasters took the steps I have taken, it just might go away sooner. Anyone who sends me an unsolicited email, advertising their "latest and greatest, will wind up on this list.

If you want to participate in this project, send an email to <mailto:scambusters@adv-marketing.com> - please include the URL for your web site. (I want to make sure you are legitimate, and not a spamster on a "fishing expedition") Note - to participate, you must be able to upload web pages to your site.

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