

# Beating the spam filters

By James Hussher

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Get your ad through spam filters!

I'll say up front that I am against spamming, I dislike it for its annoyance and basic dishonesty. I have heard the statistic that up to 70% of email is spam, and I believe it. The major ISP's such as AOL, MSN and Yahoo are ramping up efforts to reduce the junk email delivered to their subscribers' mailboxes.

There are four basic types of spam filters. First, the algorithms that are built in to email clients such as Microsoft Outlook and Eudora. Second, the additions individual users make to these built-in filters, such as blocking messages from certain domains or email addresses, or creating rules to auto-delete messages which contain certain "trigger" words. Third, we have the anti-spam software products such as Spam Cop, Spam Terminator, Spam Arrest, etc. Finally we have the anti-spam filters many ISP's now provide their subscribers.

But why is that important to you, a non-spammer that paid for an ad to go to newsletters with confirmed double opt-in subscribers? Because if your message contains the "red flags" that set off these filters, your message will be deleted before the recipient even sees it.

Therefore, it is vital that you learn how to write and design your email ads in a way that won't set off the alarms.

If someone chooses to block your specific email address, there's nothing you can do about it. And I would never abrogate anyone's right to do so.

This article will address ways to avoid having your ad or message auto-deleted before the recipient even has a chance to view it.

Here are some basic no-no's:

1. Using all caps in the subject heading.
2. Using exclamation points.
3. Using these words:
  1. amazing
  2. cancel at any time
  3. check or money order
  4. click here
  5. congratulations
  6. dear friend
  7. e-mail marketing
  8. for only (\$)
  9. free (including toll-free)
  10. great offer
  11. guarantee

12. increase sales
13. order now
14. promise you
15. risk free
16. special promotion
17. this is not spam
18. to be removed
19. unsubscribe
20. winner

(Use of one of these words will not necessarily cause your email to be auto-deleted. For instance, every issue of my ezine has an "unsubscribe" link at the bottom. The anti-spam software "scores" your email by how many of the words are present or their frequency. )

You have two choices when it comes to beating the filters. One is to avoid using these words and phrases altogether. I've found that hard to do. For example, in a recent issue, I discussed how to use your e-zine to increase business. Unfortunately the word "increase" cost me a fat 1.4 points in SpamAssassin, one of the most popular filter programs.

Your second choice is to disguise these words and phrases in clever ways by inserting keyboard symbols within them and/or replacing a letter in them with a symbol. The trick is not to make it too cryptic -- you want your readers to be able to understand what you're saying. For example, in my e-zine, I use "fr\*ee" for free.

While some spam filters pick up on this trick and penalize you for doing it by adding onto your score, I've found that the points this tactic costs you penalize you much less than using the words and phrases themselves. It's not a perfect solution, but it's working for now.

## TEST BEFORE YOU SEND

It's a great idea to test how YOUR e-mail stacks up before you send it out. The good news is you can do this for FREE.

Lyris' Content Checker (<http://www.lyris.com/contentchecker/>) tells you how your e-mail ranks in Spam Assassin. All you do is copy your e-mail text and paste it into the box on their site. They'll run your free report and e-mail a copy to you. It usually arrives within minutes.

The report will tell you exactly which words are costing you points. Usually you should only be concerned if your score is over 5 points. If so, you can either delete those words or disguise them, as I mentioned above.

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