

Spam- An Emotional Issue

By Jane Tabachnick

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Spam- more than just an annoyance. Why does Spam inspire so much passionate hate?

Spam is an emotional subject, just ask any computer user. In a sense, Spam is nothing more than unsolicited direct marketing in an email version, or electronic "junk mail". People don't get as fired up about junk from the postman, so why all the emotion about Spam? To understand why this is, you need to look at people's relationships with their computers.

Email is a push medium, like television advertising; networks push ads to you, just as you are sending, or pushing an email communication to a recipient. The television viewer has the remote control in hand to bypass commercials and just surf away. Similarly, it is the email recipient who is in the drivers seat, hand on the mouse or delete button. Whether Spam is read or not, it still considered a major annoyance for many emailers.

While both Television and email are push mediums, the difference is in the expectation. TV viewers expect advertising; in my lifetime, its always been a part of the medium. Some creative ads even have some entertainment value. Viewers have accustomed themselves to using commercial breaks to check on other shows or to get a snack.

With spam, the real emotional trigger is the proprietary way that people feel about their computers. They feel that their computers are their own private domain, and that they control what they see and hear. The resistance to spam, is mostly an emotional one; a wish to hold onto this private domain. Or at least the illusion of it. Television has had years to indoctrinate viewers into the format that networks use. I grew up with the idea that tv has commercials- it always has.

My inbox didn't always have SPAM, and it is not a welcome intruder.

Two years ago, while researching new interactive advertising technologies for an article for SAM magazine, I came across a company called Amicada. Their concept was to show commercials to computer users, while online and off, for which the viewer would be rewarded. It was completely opt in, requiring a download of their software. It then initiated ongoing pop-ups for these commercials on your computer; you could choose to delay viewing an ad, but it was guaranteed to remind you again later.

I didn't buy the concept; personally bristled at the idea of having more pop-ups while I was online, and any pop ups while offline. For me the rewards could not be high enough to want to participate; I assumed that the majority of people would feel the way I did.

Perhaps the internet surfing public cast their same vote. Despite significant support and backing by Unilever and some VC funding, Amicada has joined the DotBomb graveyard. To read the SAM article: <http://www.janetabachnick.com/mouse.html>

The other emotional trigger of spam is the content of the emails. Items hawked are typically for enlargement of private body parts, multi level marketing under the guise of "business opportunities", viagra, and plain old pornography. It is like a snake oil salesman having orbbed into our living room uninvited, and we aren't happy about the intrusion.

As spammers try to be seen and get read, over the volumes other emails flooding our inboxes, they are resorting to new, cheap tricks, casting additional aspersions on the practice. Subject lines, like "here is your statement" or "here is the info you requested" have gotten us to "fall for it", opening an email expecting it to be something in fact we had requested, only to leave us feeling taken, our time wasted. I haven't even mentioned the time and cost factors that Spam takes up.

Now that you understand the emotional issues that people feel with regard to Spam, you can see why any email perceived as spam reflects negatively on the sender. The message, spam me, and we'll never do business, ever in this lifetime. You can be perceived as being a spammer, even if people opted in to get your message, because people forget what they sign up for online. All the more reason you want to make sure that you are not an "inadvertent spammer".

To your effective emailing ~ Jane

Stay tuned for the release of my book "Are You Sending The Right Message- Effective Email Communication for Executives and Entrepreneurs."

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