

Handling Spam: Responding

By Richard Lowe

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Most spam messages will include a link at the bottom which states something like "to remove yourself from the list click here ...". On the surface this seems innocent enough, but if you do respond you are potentially increasing the amount of spam that you receive by many times.

Wait a minute. You mean you ask to be removed and instead not only are you not removed but you will get more spam than ever? How can that be so?

To understand why you must first understand how spamming works. You see, spammers operate by getting zillions and zillions of email addresses however they can.

Sometimes they purchase CD collections of "15 million clean email addresses" or "5 million email addresses" for some small amount of money. I've seen these collections as cheap as \$9.95 (one wonders how clean these collections are).

Another common tactic is to use spiders to scan thousands of web pages for email addresses. These addresses are then added to a database which is then sold or used.

And sometimes the spammers just pick a domain and send their spam to a variety of possible email addresses at that domain. They just pick a domain and use a dictionary of names and send every one of those names to the domain. Those that generate a bounced (error) message are deleted from the list.

So you see, the spammer begins with a list of email addresses which are not validated. They are simply known to not have returned a bounce message (an error indicating an email account did not

exist). However, what is not known is that a human being is actually reading the mail from that mailbox.

The problem with responding is that you validate for the spammer that a human exists at that email address. This increases the value of your email address by many times. A smart spammer can actually sell these verified addresses to collections of "clean" lists.

Of course if you actually buy something from the spammer you've increased the value of your email address to astronomical levels. In this case, you may find yourself added to countless "sucker" lists, receiving countless offers from the most obscure places.

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