

Web Rage

By Bob Osgoodby

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Bob Osgoodby
bob@adv-marketing.com

Advanced Marketing <http://adv-marketing.com>

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Some people by nature are simply nasty. You can find an article almost every day in the paper about "road rage". Someone committed a grievous offense against them (like driving too slow) and they ran them off the road. An airline attendant is punched because she didn't bring someone their drink fast enough, or a clerk is abused because the store is out of a certain product.

Well folks, these same "nasties" are on the Internet and exhibit "Web Rage". Let's face it - we all receive unsolicited email (spam) trying to sell us something almost every day. The majority is "hit and run" with either a free email account that they know will be immediately closed, or a fake email address that can't be traced. They either give you a telephone number to call, or a snail mail address to write to for further information. Very seldom will you see a return email address as they know it will be shut down before the end of the day or many times it is forged.

Now the "nasties", aggravated with all the spam they get, go on a crusade, and make complaints to all the ISP's that send this junk. The ISP's dutifully accept the complaint and investigate it. Their level of frustration raises however, every time they receive word that the address was forged and the ISP can't do anything about it. So they go after anyone they can. They might even subscribe to a newsletter, forget that they did, and complain when they get it. Worse yet, they may simply "not like" an article that was in the Newsletter. Now the real "nasties", instead of merely unsubscribing, may make a formal complaint to your ISP (Internet Service Provider) that they are being spammed.

Most ISP's will investigate complaints of this nature. Many will give the person being complained about, the chance to "plead their case". Some however, will summarily shut down their account. In other words, you are deemed guilty by the ISP and they simply cancel your account. This is not only unfair, but you may have legal recourse against an ISP that does this.

When someone subscribes to my newsletter(s), it automatically triggers a response to them, thanking them for subscribing, and telling them a bit about the newsletter. They can immediately unsubscribe if they don't want to receive it. If they do choose to receive it, and then decide they don't want it, they can easily unsubscribe by simply clicking on a link at the end of the newsletter.

Recently, I had a complaint lodged against me because my email address happened to be at the end of an article I had written, (like this one) and someone had included it in their newsletter. They also filed a complaint against every email address they could find in the newsletter, including all the

advertisers. Some people simply will not follow unsubscribe instructions and will summarily file a complaint.

I have seen a number of "opt in" newsletters accounts cancelled because of a complaint. But as times change, so does the attitude of the more progressive ISP's. They do not presume guilt. If you are on the "up and up", most spam complaints will be dismissed. They also realize that there are "nasties" out there and will work with you to solve the problem.

So - what can you do to protect yourself from this? Your best bet is to use a list server to send your publication. If they have to confirm that they subscribed, there is no question that you are in the clear. If you are using your own email to send it out, be sure to keep a copy of their request to subscribe.

Never use the ISP that hosts your web page to send out your newsletter. If they cancel your account, you will also lose all your web pages you have on their server.

If someone is too lazy to follow your unsubscribe instructions, make your best effort to take them off your list. If they are not on your list, and having it forwarded from another address, (usually a free email account) explain the situation and ask them to give you the address they subscribed under. While it may not solve the problem, at least they know you are trying.

There are "nasties" out there and if you are going to send out a newsletter or other bulk email, make sure you protect yourself from "Web Rage".

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