

Put Spam Email in the Can

Unsolicited commercial email—known as “spam”—is annoying and takes time to delete from your e-mail in-box. It’s possible, however, to reduce the amount of spam you receive.

Spammers buy email addresses from a broker, who compile lists by “harvesting” addresses from the Internet. Marketers buy the lists and then use special software that sends as many as millions of spam messages to the addresses at the click of a mouse. By limiting the times you display your email address in public—for example, in newsgroup postings, on websites, in chat rooms, or in an online service’s membership directory—you reduce the chance of it ending up on an address list.

If you do submit your address to a website, check the privacy policy to see if it allows the company to sell your address. Opt out of this provision, if possible, or choose not to submit your address to a site that won’t protect it. Read and understand the form before you transmit personal information through a site. Some allow you to opt out of receiving email from their “partners,” but you may have to uncheck a preselected box to do so.

You may want to maintain two email addresses, one for personal messages and one for news-

checkmate

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groups and chat rooms. Also consider using a disposable email address service, which creates a separate address that forwards to your permanent account. That way, if one of the disposable addresses begins receiving spam, you can shut it off without affecting your permanent address.

A unique address can also protect you. Spammers sort through possible name combinations at large Internet Service Providers (ISPs) or email services, looking for valid addresses, so a common name such as “jdoe” may get more spam than an unusual one like “jd51x02oe.”

Also try an email filter. Check your account to see if it provides a tool to filter out spam, or a way to channel it into a bulk folder.

If a “remove me” request is not honored by a spammer, report it to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at uce@ftc.gov. To complain about a removal link that doesn't work, or not being able to unsubscribe from a list, you can fill out an online complaint form at www.ftc.gov. Your complaint will be added to the FTC's Consumer Sentinel database and made available to hundreds of law enforcement and consumer protection agencies.

Whenever you complain about spam, include the full email header, which makes it possible for consumer protection agencies to follow up on your complaint. Send a copy of the spam to your ISP's abuse desk to alert the ISP about the problem on their system and help them stop it. Make sure to include a copy of the spam, along with the full email header.