Wired to the World

by *Ralph Lee Scott*

Get a Handle on Spam

Those of us of World War II vintage and even later will recall Hormel's Spam, a processed meat product that was for decades a staple of the American diet, served morning, noon, and night. A recent phenomenon, junk e-mail (a.k.a. another type of Spam), has become the bane of our collective existence. When I returned from vacation this summer, I found some 493 e-mail messages waiting to be read — timeshare offers, yet more low-priced toner cartridges, and offers of millions of dollars from Nigeria if I would only contact Mr. So-and-So with my bank account numbers. Microsoft Outlook and Outlook Express offer Rules Wizards and filters that can remove some Spam. A lot of unwanted e-mail still clogs up e-mail systems, and several programs have recently become available to help clean out our electronic mailboxes.

My current favorite is iHateSpam. This program is available from <http://www.sunbelt-software.com> on a 30-day trial with the individual license being $19.95. This program requires little set up and filters Spam into four "Quarantine" folders that are automatically created: Adult, Hazardous, Junk, and Subscription. Once incoming e-mail has been filtered into these four Quarantine folders you can review them as you have time or delete them in bulk. Users get a window showing a list of incoming e-mail that has been diverted to the Quarantine folders so you can review and retrieve any that you want to look at immediately. The Outlook version of iHateSpam is slightly more powerful than the Outlook Express version. Both versions check incoming e-mail for spammers — key phrases and words that are likely (such as "cheap toner") to come from bulk mailers. If something slips through the iHateSpam server list, iHateSpam allows you to designate incoming e-mail as either "Junk" or "non-Junk" by clicking on an icon. One can also add a specific e-mail address to a "friends" or "enemies" list by clicking on another icon. In short iHateSpam learns from incoming e-mail and gets better with time in putting e-mail in Quarantine correctly. While this program will not eliminate all spam, it is great to see all the junk mail going into the Quarantine folders. In fact, while I was writing this article, an e-mail entitled "Share your opinion and win $1000" went right into the wastebasket!

Another anti-Spam program is SpamWeasel available from <http://www.mailgate.com>. SpamWeasel is free but takes some time to set up and is not initially as effective as iHateSpam at filtering out junk e-mails. SpamWeasel requires you to negotiate a long list of difficult-to-comprehend rules involving the "root domains" from which you want to ban incoming e-mail. I finally gave up trying to configure SpamWeasel because I could never get it to filter out unwanted e-mail correctly. If you have the time and inclination the price (free) is right.

Remove Me Now! (<http://www.removemenow.com>) uses another approach to controlling Spam. Remove Me Now! offers an annual membership for $9.95, which places your e-mail address in a database that is shared with e-mail marketers who subscribe to this service to clean up their bulk e-mailing lists. If Remove Me Now! receives a large number of complaints against a spammer, they write a letter to the spammer's ISP and ask to have the account canceled. For the $9.95 fee, you can submit an unlimited number of e-mail addresses. The theory behind this service is that marketers will want to increase their profits by removing unwanted prospects from their lists in order to lower e-mailing costs.

If you have ever wondered where in the world some of this Spam comes from there is a program that can locate the IP or address of the e-mail. This software is called e-mailtrackerpro and is sold by Visualware for $29.95 for a single user license. E-mailtrackerpro analyzes the incoming e-mail header and provides you with the IP address of the sender and also tracks the location of the address on a world map. In the example they give on their Web page, the e-mail "Long Distance — 4.9 cents a minute no fees" comes from an IP address in Singapore. Using "Whois" you can obtain the real name of the sender of "anonymous" e-mails from Hotmail and Yahoo! e-mail accounts. You can use this program to locate and ask senders to stop filling up your electronic mail box with unwanted e-mail.

Hopefully, the next Spam you have to deal with, will be the edible kind!