

# Spam, Spelled Backwards, is “Maps”

by William E. Olson, Jr.



Spam,<sup>1</sup> it's everywhere. My inbox is swamped every morning. I commonly receive more than 100 messages overnight.<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming majority of these messages is junk e-mail or "spam."<sup>3</sup> Junk e-mail has proliferated geometrically over the last few years. CBS News interviewed one mega-spammer who sends out 180 million spam e-mails per day.<sup>4</sup> He is reported to be one of around 200 such characters making our lives more difficult. The questions posed in this article will include, "Can spam<sup>5</sup> find a way into your heart?" How did we get into this mess? How can we find our way out?

## SpamVantages?

It is a shame that more people don't take advantage of all of the offers presented to them by spam. Most spam is very friendly, enticing, and presents wonderful opportunities for those brave enough to click. Just a few of the spam messages received over the weekend made this obvious. This article was typed over a weekend preceding Christmas and

following Thanksgiving. My office e-mail on Monday morning included the following spam, which will be described by the "From" line and "Subject" line.<sup>6</sup>

### *SANTA CLAUS: Personalized Letter from Santa Claus*

I really think it's amazing that Santa Claus takes time from his busy schedule to send me a personalized letter. While I am appreciative, I did not bother taking my personal time to read Santa's personal letter.

### **U.S.A WIRELESS: Free Cellular Phone Offer**

It is extremely generous of Sprint through U.S.A Wireless to offer me a free Sprint cellular phone. I actually happen to be a Sprint cellular phone user through my wife's phone, so I did not bother clicking on this offer.

### **TOP OFFERS BY MAIL: William I Think You Can Win!**

I suppose I might win, especially if I don't click on this e-mail.

### Anthony: Learn How to Hypnotize Anyone!

As a teenager, I often wanted to learn how to hypnotize women, especially girls my age who seemed to ignore me with regularity. However, as an adult, I find that the ability to hypnotize might be more of a burden than a benefit.

### **BETTER HEALTH & DIET: It's Not a Diet, It's a Patch!**

There are patches for people trying to quit cigarette smoking, there are birth control patches, there are patches for those who become seasick on cruises, and now evidently, there is a diet patch. While it would be very beneficial for me

## William E. Olson, Jr.



**William E. Olson, Jr.** is a partner in the law firm of DeMars, Gordon, Olson & Zalewski in Lincoln. He is a 1974 graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Law and practices in the areas of business law, business planning, estates, trusts and real estate. Bill's e-mail address is [wolson@demargordon.com](mailto:wolson@demargordon.com).



## SPAM

to lose quite a few pounds, I really don't want to wear a patch around all day which causes me to repel food.

JOHN F. Be Careful Downloading Music Files

It is very friendly of Mr. John F. to warn me to "be careful" downloading music files. Since I do not download music files, I did not bother "clicking" on this one.

### **JACOB DEAN: William, Free Quote to Eliminate Your Debt**

This is only one of about two dozen elimination of debt or mortgage refinance e-mails received this weekend. I appreciate that the "quote" in this case was "free." It keeps me from running up my credit card bill.

RACHAEL: Try and Beat This

What, exactly, should I "try and beat?" This was only one of many e-mails received which tell me nothing about the substance of the request. Obviously, there is no way that I would open this e-mail.

### **AMERICAN LIFE DIRECT: Life Insurance in 10 minutes—no medical Exam**

If a person were seriously shopping for life insurance, there are many Internet sites which will make comparison quotes from various companies. These are legitimate sites. However, any unsolicited life insurance sales effort will remain unopened.

### **20JMW744@juno.com: Douglas vuylasuzrmy ja**

Many, many spam e-mails appear with gibberish in the "subject" or "from" space. By all means, avoid these. These very likely are carrying some sort of viral infection for your computer.

### **Cindy: Make her Scream!**

I don't know and I don't want to know. First of all, why would I want to make anyone scream?

### **VDownload: DVD/CD Duplication in Seconds**

Mr. Download is trying to be very helpful to assist me in duplicating, illegally no doubt, DVDs and CDs in seconds. I think I'll pass.

### **Mr. Daniel Orjl: PRJVAJE MAJL**

One can easily be deceived in to believing that Mr. Orjl is seriously soliciting my legal services. However, I would not open this for all the great fees in the world. First of all, I only open such messages with the subject: "Major Private Mail."

### **Joey Crump: Heart Trouble? Know in a glance if you have— Author removed 98% . . .**

This could be an ad or solicitation for special eyeglasses which allows you to know simply by looking at yourself in a mirror or at various body parts that you have heart trouble.

Or, it could be some methodology for removing authors 98% of the time. It is very difficult to know what this one is about.

### **Stock Saver: The Cat in the Hat on Your PC.**

This could be a solicitation for a screensaver, or a solution to the problem we all encounter from time to time, Cats in Hats who sit on our computers.

### **Personal Invention Invitation: Earn a 6% Rebate on ALL Gas Purchases**

This is a very attractive offer, with gasoline prices approaching \$1.50 per gallon, and quite often, more. However, this could be an offer for rebates on methane or propane purchases.

Your Info Presents: 100% On-Line Degree

This seems to be the offer of a lifetime, obtain a degree without attending college. While many universities and colleges offer on-line classes, they normally do not solicit via spam.

Additional offers received this weekend included: Devon, who asked whether someone was using my identity; Tracy Donovan who was evidently e-mailing from the Southern Hemisphere because she thought it was summertime and time to get in shape; Rita who offered to sell me a laser gun for only \$6.95, which was originally priced at \$19.96<sup>7</sup>; Discounted Cigs who offered to sell me cigarette cartons under \$15, shipping included; the Elite Mailing Post which wanted to inform me that someone out there wants to date me; Carmen Soils<sup>8</sup> who evidently wants to sell me various drugs, including Valium and Vicodin; Heather who asked whether I want to "hear something I'm not supposed to"; Mr. or Ms. "Animal Lover" who offers free pet treats; "Daddy," who reminds me that it's time to go car shopping; Rosemary Trip who offers me a F-R-E-E V-I-A-G-R-A S-A-M-P-L-E; Great Deals which offered me three silk ties for \$3 (an offer that I was tempted to take since my ties are getting rather shabby); "Italy," which offers me custom Italian charm bracelets<sup>10</sup>; Candida Alert which asks me whether I am one of the Americans who have Candida<sup>11</sup>; Bee Alive, which tells me that energy never tasted so good<sup>12</sup>; Secret Investigations which tells me that I can find out anything about anyone<sup>13</sup>; several offers for ink jet printer ink cartridges; Mars-Host 334131.com, which tells me that it can clear my "nail fungi infection" simply by clicking on the e-mail; a very helpful Anthony who says that I can take a breathalyzer test before I drive if I simply click on his e-mail; a friendly Toni Booth who simply says, "Hello"; the RatRace, which tells me that my alarm clock is ticking and I can "kill it" with a "home job"; Gloria Choi who informs me that I can add three inches today (even though I'm already 6'1" tall); PennyRadar who can eliminate my speeding tickets for me and many, many others.

Okay, so there's a lot of spam out there and some of it really (well, maybe all of it) offers no redeeming qualities.

However, it seems to me that had I been willing to take up various junk e-mail offers, I could have accomplished the following: Replaced hair loss in my head; removed unwanted hair from the rest of my body; refinanced my mortgage; eliminated all of my debt; increased certain body parts; decreased certain body parts; learned to speak Japanese, Swedish, Farsi and other foreign languages; purchased all of my pharmaceuticals without a prescription; increased my net income by working from home; met exciting new people; attended one or more college or high school reunions; earned a Criminal Justice Degree on-line; purchased a new automobile without a test drive; obtained the cheapest airline and hotel tickets possible; and otherwise, generally improved my life and the lives of those around me.

## How can we avoid all of this spam?

The easiest and most surefire way to avoid spam is to not use e-mail. There are still some attorneys who take this route, and their lives are much easier as a result.<sup>14</sup>

A second method, cheap but pretty effective, is to use a “public” e-mail address for all on-line purchases, listserv subscriptions and other communications over the Internet. Hotmail and Yahoo still offer free e-mail addresses. Then, the “official” or “business” address will never be “out there” for mining by the spammers. However, this means that if you are already using a business address which contains your firm’s domain name, e.g., “stang@thebestlawfirmthecountry.com,” then you will need to change your business address, and, maybe, your firm’s domain name. Similarly, if your existing e-mail address is to be found at various web sites with your prior approval, these will also need to be changed. Further, stationery and business cards may need to be updated. Then, NEVER use your business address for ANY on-line communication. Order airline tickets, hotel reservations, clothes etc. with the “public” alternative address. This can be a real hassle.


A third method is to use filters in your e-mail program to filter spam to a junk e-mail box. Microsoft’s Outlook has this ability, but it is not very effective. It filters by the address of the sender and by a limited list of key words. Other programs are better, but not perfect.

The fourth method is to use third party add-on software which has much more extensive automatic filtering capabilities. For example, I am currently using Norton Internet Security on my home computer which filters junk and “adult content” e-mail and sends it to a special folder for later review or deletion. It seems to be about 95% effective.<sup>15</sup> The cost of this program is about \$100. It also includes a pretty solid fire-wall and a very good anti-virus program. The disadvantage to these third party solutions is that it is necessary to review the junk folder to see if any legitimate e-mails were inadvertently picked up. The software can be “trained” to allow mail from “wanted” senders to get through. Other software products will do the same thing as the Norton solution.<sup>16</sup> There are some

“freeware” or “shareware” programs available, too. I have not tried any of these.<sup>17</sup>

The last method is to use a service provider such as Postini.<sup>18</sup> These programs are “enterprise-wide” solutions, and use your e-mail server or your Internet Service Provider. They work similarly to the third party software, and those to whom I have talked about Postini, are very pleased with its results.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Spam is aggravating. There are no quick and easy solutions, although help is out there. Legislation probably won’t cure the problem since much of the spam originates overseas. So, maybe the answer is to enjoy the spam, fry it, broil it, chop it up into small chunks and add it to your salads.<sup>20</sup> 

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The junk e-mail variety, not the spiced, canned luncheon meat.

<sup>2</sup>Over a recent weekend, from 12:15 p.m. on Saturday until 7:45 a.m. on Monday, I received 181 e-mails in my “in” box. Of these, only three were “legitimate.”

<sup>3</sup>E-mail spam has given the namesake processed meat a bad reputation.

<sup>4</sup>“No End in Sight for Spammers,” *CBSNEWS.com*, July 14, 2003.

<sup>5</sup>As opposed to “canned Spam.”

<sup>6</sup>I have intentionally and not by way of omission excluded the e-mail addresses of the spammers discussed in this article. If any reader wants such information, it’s too late, I’ve deleted all of the e-mails from my computer. Be patient, eventually they will contact you.

<sup>7</sup>Does the military know about this? What are “laser guns?” Are they a spin-off from Star Wars technology?

<sup>8</sup>Yes, Carmen “Soils.” Imaginative, original, but not that funny.

<sup>9</sup>Evidently, this is from the Nation of Italy, which somehow has e-mail capabilities without human intervention.

<sup>10</sup>I am looking for certain types of Christmas gifts for my wife, mother-in-law and sister-in-law, so this one was very tempting.

<sup>11</sup>“Candida” is, evidently, a genus of yeast-like fungi. Some species of Candida are part of the normal flora of the mouth, intestines and vagina. Several species may cause infection in humans, especially immunocompromised persons, including *C. albicans*, *C. tropicalis* and *C. krusei*. I obtained this through a Google search for “What is Candida?” The definition was found at <http://aids.hall-lym.ac.kr/dict/c.html>. I had no idea what it was when I started this article.

<sup>12</sup>This is evidently an advertisement for honey

<sup>13</sup>This might come in very handy.

<sup>14</sup>Although, the ones I know who do not have e-mail have clerical staff that does, so, the secretaries’ or legal assistants’ lives are still challenged by full e-mail boxes.

<sup>15</sup>Not a scientific study, yet. More of an observation.

<sup>16</sup>*PC Magazine’s* web site, [pcmag.com](http://pcmag.com), has several articles and reviews regarding spam and solutions. Simply go to the site and do an on-site search for “spam,” and these will be listed.

<sup>17</sup>For example, see <http://eremover.bizhosting.com/> for Email Remover.

<sup>18</sup>Which can be found at the Postini Web site, [www.postini.com/](http://www.postini.com/).

<sup>19</sup>Interestingly, “popups” which appear when “surfing the Net” can easily be controlled by simply adding the “Google” toolbar to your Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape program and enabling “Internet Popup” on the Options window. Go to [google.com](http://google.com), click on “Service and Tools” and page down to “Google Toolbar.” Click on this and follow the instructions.

<sup>20</sup>See [www.pitt.edu/~blair1/spam-recipes.html](http://www.pitt.edu/~blair1/spam-recipes.html) for Spam recipes.