Techniques of the email marketeers

Presented to: Junk mail fatigue - finding a cure

8th October 1998

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What is this talk about?

• How much Unsolicited Bulk Email is there?
• Who is sending this UBE?
• What are they advertising?
• Who is it being sent to?
• Where do lists come from?
• How are they hiding their tracks?
• How do they get you to read it?
• What is the legislators impact?
• What other trends can be seen?
How much UBE is there?

• No-one knows! AOL claim 30% of their traffic is UCE
• Personal experiences differ considerably
• People forget mailing lists when doing calculations

Demon’s measurements:

• 50% of all mail is mailing list mail
• Other multiply delivered mail is 5-10% of total

There is no reliable data, only personal experiences, so I give mine! It accords with most reports I have seen.

100 messages a month to <richard@turnpike.com> this year, but just 14 in the week to last Monday.

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Who is sending UBE?

- **Americans**
  >95% : using hotmail, yahoo, iname rather than an ISP

- **Virgin Net**
  7 cases in 6 months - worst UK provider by far (but only 1% of my problem)

- **Everybody else...**
  UBE comes from everywhere, though usually in (broken) English

- **...even Demon’s customers**
  15 events in the last month (from 250,000 users) - one sent to me!

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What are they advertising?

- Cancer cures
- Stock tips
- LOAN$$$
- Dental plans
- Toner cartridges
- Dating services
- Sex sites
- Search engine secrets
- Make money by working at home!
- Bulk email software and lists of addresses (10% !)

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Who are they sending it to?

- **Me!** <richard@turnpike.com> 14 last week
  other addresses 6 last week
- Abuse desk
  <abuse@demon.net> 100 emails in September
- Robots
  <faq_request@turnpike.com> 25% of 1998 activity
- Invented names
  <merchantlike@highwayman.com> 20 a week
- Dead names
  <richard@locomotive.com> 22 last week
    last used in July ’96

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Where do lists come from?

- Usenet
- Archives
- FAQs and other articles
- Web sites
- Mailing lists
- Magazine subscriptions & trade shows
- Imagination
- OTHER LISTS!
How are they hiding their tracks?

- Forging SMTP envelopes
  declaring incorrect domain in protocol - affects bounces & filters
  MAIL FROM:<dan@aol.com> (actually Sprynet)

- Forging From lines
  declaring incorrect name in message - affects replies
  From: <friend@public.com>

- Forging Received lines
  hiding the source from all but the cognoscenti
  Received from: fake.isp.com

- Relaying
  not all servers record the IP address
  but main reason for relaying is the AMPLIFIER
How do they get you to read it?

- Misleading subjects
  “Hi!”, “Call me when you get this”, “re your site”

- Misleading sources
  lisa@yahoo.com, freetraining@ibm.net

- Good copywriting
  “Hi, ever thought about bulk E-mailing”
  “I spoke to you in the chatroom…”

- Wild claims
  “Free video offer”, “Everyone gets approval”, “Double your income”

- Interesting layout
  Use of HTML, links to websites
What is the legislators impact?

• Claims of HR3888 adherence
• ADV in subject lines
• More “remove addresses”
• Statements about free speech
• BUT no change in volume, and no major companies
What other trends can be seen?

- **Mutation**
  Dave Rhodes has passed into history

- **This is a one-time mailing, don’t bother to remove**
  People learning that unsolicited email is unwelcome

- **Use of addresses of convenience**
  hotmail addresses make your ISP a third party

- **Use of packages to send the mail**
  Long “To:” lists now a rarity

- **Use of mainstream mailing list software (QMAIL)**

- **Major players putting toes into the water**
  amazon.com thinks a customer relationship is enough
Summary

• How much UBE is there? 1200+ per annum each
• Who is sending this UBE? Americans
• What are they advertising? Garbage
• Who is it being sent to? Anyone they can
• Where do lists come from? Other lists
• How are they hiding their tracks? Forgery
• How are they getting you to read it? Lying
• What is the legislators impact? Negligible
• What other trends can be seen? Mutation