

'How to' Guides

Email abuse: how to stop misogynist and offensive spam

Lilith was asked by several women's groups to look into how we could stop the daily influx of unwanted pornography into our inboxes. After some consultation with online feminist groups, we formulated the following advice.

It was agreed that although it is distressing that the onus is once again on the offended women to take steps to stop SPAM, action is necessary.



What is SPAM?

SPAM is unwanted email sent to accounts such as Hotmail, AOL and Yahoo by commercial businesses, which randomly generate your address or buy it from "harvesters".

It gets its name from a Monty Python sketch where two people are having a conversation and another character starts saying "spam, spam spam, spam" very loudly until the conversation becomes impossible. Nuisance emails became known as SPAM because they will eventually drown out email conversation if not kept in check.

A lot of these unwanted emails take the form of pornographic and highly misogynistic material, including advertisements for drug rape, child porn, under-age sex and many other issues that are abhorrent to the violence against women agenda.

Why is SPAM a problem?

- It wastes our time
- It may be illegal
- Some forms of porn SPAM (particularly child porn) are illegal in some countries. If you are found with it on your computer, you could be jailed. For more information visit spam.abuse.net.
- It perpetuates stereotypes of women that we are fighting to eradicate
- It is another form of harassment

More than 40% of internet traffic is now thought to be SPAM content, making every user responsible for stopping it.

How do I stop it?

Hotmail Users

- Sign in to Hotmail and click Options (next to the Address Book tab)
- Click Mail Display Settings and select Message Headers
- Click Full and OK
- Look for the ISP of the sender (in bold)
- Example: MIME-Version: 1.0
X-Originating-IP: [217.36.120.166]
X-Originating-Email: [shiva_destroyer@hotmail.com]
- Copy the whole message (including the ISP) and forward it to abuse@hotmail.com
- For non-Hotmail SPAM (one that is sent from another address) repeat the above steps and look for the following:
Received: from mailer66.bulk.scd.yahoo.com ([66.218.73.48]) by mc9-f6.bay6.hotmail.com with Microsoft SMTPSVC(5.0.2195.5600); Fri, 21 Feb 2003 05:34:39 -0800
X-Message-Info: dHZMQeBBv44IPE7o4B5bAg==]Received: from [81.77.70.114] by g53.gc.sc5.yahoo.com; Fri, 21 Feb 2003 13:34:38 (GMT)
- Then copy the message and its header and forward it to the ISP which sent the mail using abuse@ISPname.com (eg abuse@hotmail.com or abuse@aol.com) or complain to the Webmaster.

Yahoo Users

- Sign in to YahooMail and click on Mail Options.
- Select General Preferences.
- Select Redirect incoming unsolicited mail to the Bulk Mail folder in the Special Folders section.
- Select Show all headers on incoming messages in Messages section.
- Finally, select Block HTML graphics in email messages from being downloaded in the Security section. This stops any offensive images or invisible transmitting of your address to take place.

AOL users

- AOL users please address any complaints to tosemail@aol.com

Why should we complain?

If enough women and men who are disgusted at the invasion of our inboxes by porn were to complain, ISPs such as Yahoo, MSN and AOL would be forced to create tighter controls or risk losing customer revenue.

The more time they spend responding to complaints, the more money they lose.

Tips to stop SPAM building up

- Never respond to SPAM, even to unsubscribe – that simply confirms your address as real
- Read 'I accept' forms and customer agreements carefully – there is usually an option to keep your email private or to stop the company passing on your address to its associates
- Don't post your email address on public sites – address harvesters gather public emails to sell to spammers
- Create a more unusual address – john.smith@hotmail.com is easy to generate. Try adding numbers and underscores (the_ character). Examples: j0hn.sm1th@hotmail.com or j_ohn_smith@hotmail.com
- Try writing your email address in different way on sites. Examples: mynameis @ eaveshousing .co .uk (using spaces within the address) or writing the @ symbol as 'at' (mynameis_at_eaveshousing.co.uk). This means your address is no longer recognisable as email.
- If you have mailing lists or free-posting sites where people can leave messages, such as YahooGroups, have them moderated so someone has to approve each email address which wishes to post. This will let you filter out SPAM harvesters.