

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

What's in Your In-Box?

Do you receive lots of junk email messages from people you don't know? It's no surprise if you do. As more people use email, marketers are increasingly using email messages to pitch their products and services. Some consumers find unsolicited commercial email — also known as “spam” — annoying and time consuming; others have lost money to bogus offers that arrived in their email in-box.

Typically, an email spammer buys a list of email addresses from a list broker, who compiles it by “harvesting” addresses from the Internet. The marketer then uses special software that can send hundreds of thousands — even millions — of email messages to the addresses at the click of a mouse.

To reduce the amount of unwanted commercial email you receive:

- **Try not to display your email address in public.** That includes newsgroup postings, chat rooms, websites or in an online service's membership directory.
- **Check the privacy policy when you submit your address to a website.** See if it allows the company to sell your address. You may want to opt out of this provision, if possible.
- **Read and understand the entire form before you transmit personal information through a website.** Some web sites allow you to opt out of receiving email from its “partners” — but you may have to **uncheck** a preselected box if you want to opt out.
- **Decide if you want to use two email addresses** — one for personal messages and one for newsgroups and chat rooms.
- **Use an email filter.** Check your email account to see if it provides a tool to filter out potential spam or a way to channel spam into a bulk email folder.

If you receive unwanted spam email, you can:

- **Report it to the Federal Trade Commission.** Send a copy of any unwanted or deceptive messages to spam@uce.gov. If you want to complain about a removal link that doesn't work or not being able to unsubscribe from a list, you can fill out the FTC's 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, it's important to include the full email header.*
- **Send a copy of the spam to your ISP's abuse desk.** By doing this, you can let the ISP know about the spam problem on their system and help them stop it in the future.
- **Complain to the sender's ISP.** Most ISPs want to cut off spammers who abuse their system.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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