The South Bay Mug

MACINT�SH

MAChinations

A personal view from Bob

Protect yourself

I've recently had to dump a couple of my email addresses because they were overwhelmed by spam. In the old days I didn't worry too much about protecting my address, but now spam is a big problem and I'm much more careful. I've discussed many of these steps before, but a review doesn't hurt.

- Have several addresses. Use one for close friends and others for doing business on-line. Be prepared to eventually jettison them if they get infested.

- Use jetable.org to create temporary addresses for use with outfits you don't trust.

- If you have a web page, encrypt the addresses. Spammers routinely comb web pages looking for addresses. I used SpamStopper which converts an email address with it's telltale mailto: and @ into an text string or a java applet. Since I still get spam, I suspect some spammers may have figured a way around this approach.

- I now use a graphic for addresses on my sites. This requires the spammer to view the graphic and use an optical character recognition (OCR) procedure to retrieve it. Unfortunately the viewer can't just click the address to send you mail. They have to type it in. Use a font that may give the OCR readers a bit more trouble.

  Member@ISP.com

- Some people try to hide an email address by eliminating telltale clues, e.g. member_at_ISP_dot_com. Hopefully the viewer understands this and can enter the correct address.

- Beware of PDF files. Spammers can scan the contents of a PDF file, so don't put your email address in it unless it's a graphic. My articles are posted on our web site as PDF files but have my address as a graphic element (see bottom right).

- All this is for naught if your friends don't protect your address. When sending an email to a group, put the addresses in the bcc: (blind carbon copy) box so all the recipients won't see the addresses. Otherwise, if a recipient has their computer compromised, the list may fall into the hands of a spammer and be used to send spam.

- Use a more obscure email address. bob@isp.com, joe@isp.com, jim@isp.com and mary@isp.com are obvious targets for dictionary spammers.

- Look on the Internet (e.g. Google) for your email address. You may find someone has put it on their web page. I wrote a software review and found that the publisher added it to their web page as a testimonial, along with my email address. Great! I was unable to contact them to have it removed. While you're there, check your telephone number. Unless it's unlisted, a cell phone or or you opt out, Google will display your name and address. This may be OK and does help people trying to find you. Also check your social security number.

- I use MyPopBarrier to scan my messages on several servers and delete spam on the spot, rather than downloading it to my computer.

- Thwart Web Bugs. Spammers put hidden HTML requests in their messages to tell them when you read it and to confirm your email address. Turn it off in the preferences. You can always load images manually if they look legit.