

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is spam?**

There are many definitions, but generally, spam refers to unsolicited commercial messages sent via electronic mail to advertise products and services, often to large group of recipients, without the recipients' prior request or consent. In addition, there is usually no pre-existing relationship between sender and recipient that would legitimise such contact.

2. **Why is spam a problem?**

Spam is a nuisance to the recipients. It imposes storage, transmission and computing costs on Internet and e-mail service providers, and recipients have to spend time sifting through and deleting unwanted e-mails. Many feel that such an act is also rude, intrusive and lacking in e-mail etiquette. The amount of spam is also on the rise. The April 24<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Economist* magazine reported that unwanted bulk e-mail now accounts for 45% of overall e-mail traffic worldwide, up from only 8% in September 2001.

3. **Why do people send out spam?**

Marketers see spam as a convenient and low-cost means of direct marketing. Currently, the cost of sending out large quantities of messages, especially via Internet e-mail, is very small. At the same time, the reach of e-mails is high, since e-mails can potentially reach people all over the world. In fact, many studies have shown that e-mail marketing, when done appropriately, can be highly effective. Appropriate e-mail marketing requires marketers to obtain the permission of consumers, to target their messages to those who have expressed an interest in a particular product or service, and, at the very least, to provide recipients with the opportunity of having their names removed from future mailings.

4. **How does the spammer get my e-mail address?**

The spammer can acquire e-mail addresses through a variety of means. These may include harvesting them from websites, purchasing them from third parties who compile such information, or simply using "dictionary attacks" – using software to try out all possible combinations of letters, common names and words in e-mail addresses. An e-mail spammer can buy a list of e-mail addresses from a list broker, who compiles it by harvesting addresses from Internet websites. If your e-mail address appears in a newsgroup posting, on a website, in a chat room, or in an online services membership directory, it may find its way onto these lists.

5. **Is sending spam illegal in Singapore?**

The act of sending unsolicited bulk electronic messages is not illegal in Singapore. However, if the e-mail causes degradation to the performance of computer system, the sender may be prosecuted under Section 7 of the Computer Misuse Act for unauthorised obstruction of use of computer.

6. **Why don't we enact new laws to make spam illegal in Singapore?**

This option is being studied. To enact a law is a serious step and a costly exercise. We should only do so when we are reasonably certain that there is no viable alternative, and that the law can be enforced to achieve its intended purpose. Based

on experience in other countries so far however, anti-spam laws have not been effective in reducing spam.

7. **How can I avoid receiving spam?**

There are several practical precautions one can take to reduce the risk of receiving spam.

First, always be careful as to whom you give your e-mail address. Whenever you fill out registration forms, surveys or any online documents requesting e-mail addresses, read carefully the privacy policy explaining how your e-mail address will be used, before deciding whether to submit your e-mail address. Pay attention to check boxes that request the right to send you e-mails or share your e-mail address with partners. Avoid providing your e-mail address unless you are confident that it would not be used for spamming activities. Opt out of member directories that place your e-mail address online.

Second, establish multiple e-mail addresses for different purposes. When using an unfamiliar website that requires an e-mail address to be posted or posting to a newsgroup, establish a “disposable” e-mail address for that specific purpose.

Third, make use of anti-spam software or spam filtering of your ISP or e-mail service provider.

Finally, avoid using short e-mail addresses that are common or easy to guess.

8. **Should I complain or reply to the spammer in order to avoid receiving further spam messages?**

You should do that only if you are confident that the sender is responsible and trustworthy and will take your request seriously. Otherwise, the request may be used as a confirmation that your e-mail address is valid, and subject it to “promotion” to a premier spam list.

9. **Is there any software that can help me to block or screen out spam?**

There are some software available in the market that can help to curb spam. These software use a variety of solutions, such as blacklist/whitelist filtering, spam content guessing, distribution checksum, among other things. However, it should be noted that every software has its limitation. For example, to get around blacklist filters, spammers use "hit-and-run" tactics. To get around whitelist filters, spammers use "fake e-mails" tactics. All solutions also face the risk that legitimate e-mails may be filtered away.

10. **Can I approach my service provider for help?**

Yes, most of the major ISPs in Singapore currently have in place policies and procedures to assist their customers to help investigate and prevent spam.