

Computer Bits by Mark Eggert of Raad One Network Solutions, Inc.

Welcome to Computer Bits, a series of articles on computers and network information. This month we have another question and answer session. The question is: I'm getting a lot of spam in my email, how can I stop it?

If you want to keep using email, stopping spam is very hard to do. As the spammers multiply they also get more sophisticated. So the best thing you can hope for is to limit the amount of spam you receive. The first thing to do would be to take advantage of any spam filters that your email provider provides. If your email comes in through a company service, where your email address is something like john@doecompany.com, then you'll need to either install spam filtering software on your computer or on your company's email server. The second thing to do would be to use an email program that includes some spam filtering, such as Microsoft's Outlook 2003. Installing and configuring these spam filters does take some time initially and some additional time periodically for fine tuning to keep the spam to a minimum.

While this may not sound like great news it is good news to know you can limit the spam you receive. Now on the flip side of this we should look at what you can do to protect yourself from spam. The first and biggest thing to do is to use a disposable email address for any time when you need to provide an email address on the internet. If you noticed that this address is getting a lot of spam, throw it away and create a new one! The second thing to do is to be very careful to who you give your email address to. The third thing to do is never reply to a spam email in hopes of removing your email address from their list, doing so just confirms that your address is a live one. And the last thing I'll suggest is to use an email program that will allow you to not download any graphics contained in emails until you ask for them. I learned about this email harvesting technique last weekend. Spammers are now sending out emails with a small white graphic in it and most email programs will automatically go to the internet to retrieve this graphic when you open the email. Well, guess what, when your program does this your email address is captured by the spammer as a live one. Microsoft's Outlook 2003 is one such program that allows you to not download these graphics until you ask for them. There are others and many of them will soon have patches that will allow this. Hopefully, you've gained something from this answer!

If you have a computer or network question you'd like answered and you think others would like to know the answer to, please forward them to me. My email address is meggert@wi.rr.com, my phone number is 262-679-7704 and my fax number is 262-679-7664.