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A Killer App Is Dying

E-mail is generally recognized to have been one of the killer apps that put the Internet on the map. Now a cancerous version of e-mail, a. k. a. SPAM is threatening to kill, if not the Internet, at least is most important part, the World Wide Web.

I am no longer able to use the e-mail address that comes with my ISP account. I get around one hundred pieces of junk mail delivered daily to that mail box making it a chore to filter out the worthwhile messages. It is no longer a question of filtering out the SPAM, now you have to do it the other way around, look for real mail in the pile of SPAM. I just don't have the time to waste on such a task.

I have solved the problem by asking all my real correspondents to use a different e-mail address and I just bulk delete the ISP provided junk SPAM. If someone accidentally sends me mail to the ISP address, it won't get read, it will be tossed with the SPAM.

The destruction of the ISP provided mail box is a bother but not a real problem. On the other hand, if you have a commercial web site and addresses such as `webmaster@domain.ext`, `info@domain.ext`, and `sales@domain.ext` get taken over by the SPAMsters then you do have a real problem that cost you money, not only in the cost of filtering out the SPAM but also in lost sales should you accidentally discard with the SPAM a valid e-mail from a customer or a prospect.

Software Times is not a commercial web site but recently the SPAMsters discovered my `webmaster@softwaretimes.com` e-mail address. Can you believe it, this address has been "sold" by an e-mail address "harvester" to various SPAMsters who thinks they will get rich by selling me their junk. For Software Times again the solution is simple, I just removed the address from my e-mail server and any mail sent to this address simply disappears into a "blackhole".

But what about commercial web sites that cannot simply cut off communications with the outside world? Commercial sites that need "info," "webmaster," and "sales" e-mail addresses. There are several services and software packages that supposedly help you filter out the SPAM but, in truth, they all require a lot of work on your part, read that as "expense," and they don't solve the problem at all. All they do is to add a level of complexity to the problem while not providing a solution. In my opinion, the solution lies in getting rid of e-mail as a way for customers to communicate with you.

There are at least two very good substitutes for e-mail: a discussion board or forum and the HTML form where the user can type in his query. For questions that do not require privacy, the forum format is my preferred way to communicate with customers. My webhosting service uses a forum as their main avenue of communication with the world. They also use HTML forms for their help desk and they use e-mail for some private communications but the bulk of the traffic is handled via forum and it works very well. Give them a visit: HTTPme.com

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