@ WORK

Killer App Apt to Be Killed?

By William Powell

Is it the end of email as we know it? So thinks its inventor. Eric Allman, the creator of the first Internet mail program and current CTO of Sendmail ◁ᵈ᎒ www.sendmail.com a company that builds secure email systems for enterprises, believes that people will stop using email if the current rate of spam increases. "There's a genuine concern that too much spam will kill off email," he says. "We haven't quite got there yet, but it could happen."

The Internet pioneer points to the cost-effectiveness of the medium as its Achilles heel. Currently, advertisers aren't paying a penny to fill your inbox with unwanted email. Allman's solution? "We must make it chargeable to the sender. One way is to use e-cash. Every time a spam is received, the receiver charges the sender." But there's a catch: Tracking down the spam's source can be tricky; much of the spam we receive doesn't originate with the address listed. To fur-

ther complicate the issue, who's to say what qualifies as spam? Though it's easy to lump all unwanted email in the spam category, Allman points out all that is spam doesn't sizzle: "There's no clear definition of what spam is," he says. "If I sign up on someone's Website and start receiving information from them, it's hard to say whether that's spam or not."

Definitions aside, most of us know spam when we see it, and, thankfully, there's something you can do to keep its volume in check. McAfee.com ◁·)) **www.mcafee.com** provides these tips for cutting down on your spam intake.

Beware of purchasing spam-advertised products. Tempting as that Webcam offer may be, buying items advertised through spam only encourages spammers and makes more personally identifiable information (for example, name, address, phone number, credit card numbers, and so forth) available. It's also a sure-fire way to guarantee that you'll receive more of it.

Refrain from using the reply or remove option. In a perfect society, we'd be able to jot off a note requesting the proprietors of said Webcam company to kindly cease its solicitous correspondence. But it ain't happenin' in the real world. Most companies just flag your email address as "live" and send you more spam.
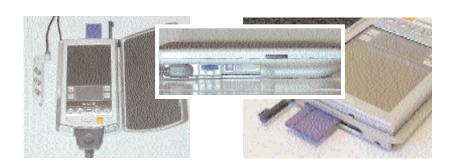
Use a public email address while online. There are several good reasons to have a Web-based email account, and spam is one of the best. Use your public account when participating in newsgroups, joining contests, or anytime that your email is requested by a third party online. Spam will go there instead of your private address.

Don't post your email address online. Before you post your email address, know whether it will be displayed or used, then see the previous tip.

For additional protection, spam-filtering software should be used.

Pocket Armor

It's a tough world out there—as witnessed by the beating taken by our handheld devices—and though you can't don a suit of armor, your PDA can. DS International ◁·)) **www.dsi-usa.com** a company specializing in computer peripherals and accessories, has crafted a series of pocket armor PDA cases to protect your investment. Available for popular models such as Compaq's iPAQ, Sony's Clié, and Palm's M500, the metallic, clamshell devices provide a customized fit and a level of protection well beyond the standard leather cover. Prices range from US$29 to $34. See the company's Website for purchase information.

@Play

Have you ever wondered what keeps the positive protons from flying apart in the nucleus of an atom? Or what the classical tune is that accompanies the "Beef. It's What's for Dinner" ad campaign? Abuzz.com, a spin-off community of the *New York Times* on the Web, ◁·)) **www.abuzz.com** just might have the answer.

Abuzz considers itself to be a "knowledge network," which, for the most part, is an apt description. You can place questions in a number of categories and subcategories. Once posted, an email is sent to individuals likely to have the answer you're looking for. Responses are then sent to you via email, as well as posted on the site. But in tit-for-tat fashion, you also receive questions based upon your profile.

In addition to asking questions, Abuzz allows you to start discussions, which many members seem to prefer.

Abuzz isn't perfect—the site doesn't monitor for misinformation—and anyone expecting the site to be an oracle of the Web will be disappointed. But for the time being, it's one of the best things out there to answer your questions when you don't know where else to turn.

Shareware and pay-for versions are plentiful. SpamDetective, SpamEater Pro, and MailWasher are just a few.

◄⑴ **Source/ Silicon.com and McAfee.com**

You Don't Know Zip

Who would have thought that something as quaint as our postal ZIP code would be of such use in the digital age? But those five numbers enable the Web to offer one of its most useful resources —and deliver on its promise of personalized information we need, when we need it. Websites utilizing ZIP codes are providing everything from local crime maps to the nearest Blue Bunny ice cream retailer (a personal favorite). Here's a sampling:

Weather.com. Enter your zip and get a 10-day forecast.

Homeenergysaver.ibl.gov. Find the best energy-saving upgrades for homes in your neck of the woods.

OpenSecrets.org. Created by the Center for Responsive Politics, this site tracks money in politics and its effect on elections and public policy.

MovieFone.com. You don't get the voice of the phone version, but you still get the show listings, as well as reviews, previews, and feature stories.

VolunteerMatch.com. Feel the need to serve your community but don't know where to start? Enter your zip and find a list of volunteer opportunities in your area.

Skeeterbites.com. Want to know if the skeeters are bitin'? Enter your ZIP for detailed information on whether you should tie down the kids.

◄⑴ **Source/Yahoo Internet Life, www.yil.com**

William Powell is an associate editor of T+D; wpowell@astd.com.

@Work covers Internet technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to atwork@astd.org.

Three Websites for the
Road Warrior

You've got the gear, but do you have the information you need?

I'm Awake, I'm Awake

All you needed was a little shuteye before delivering your presentation the next morning, but when you called the front desk to schedule a wake-up call, the kid on the other end said, "Yeah, sure, I got it. Don't worry." Well, you worried—for good reason. In a time like that, it's good to have a backup. Try ◄⑴ **www.1-800-555-tell.com** After you register for this free service, you can call the 800 number included in the Web address and say "wake-up call," the time you'd like to be awakened, and the phone number where you can be reached. The service will give you a call at the specified time.

PC Phone Home

Leave an important file on your home PC? No sweat. For a monthly fee, Gotomypc.com ◄⑴ **www.gotomypc.com** gives you access to your computer's email, files, and programs from anywhere in the world. Plans start at US$15 per month.

On the Wing

Sometimes getting home is the hardest part of the trip. Anyone who has tried to fly out of Chicago's O'Hare in the summer knows that all too well. When you have to jockey for the next available flight, FlightArrivals.com ◄⑴ **www.flightarrivals.com** is sure to come in handy. The Website provides independent arrival, departure, and delay information. Choose an airline, type in the flight number and date, click Go, and the site provides real-time information regarding the flight's status.

Quick Tip

Outlook 2000's Out of Office Assistant can forward your email to a remote computer while you're away. Select Tools, then Out of Office Assistant, and click on Add Rule. Under Perform These Actions, select the Forward check box. Now, in the To box, enter the email address where you'd like to forward your messages.

It's also nice to include an out-of-office reply. In the initial dialog box, select "I am currently Out of the Office" and enter a brief reply, including dates and location, in the box below.