

I was prompted to write in after reading the articles on The Straights Times Forum on Friday the 25th June 2004.

The spams that has been wasting my precious time are those that doesn't say much in the email body but comes with an attachment. Subject headings are a permutation of "Hello!" to "Important!" to "Your photos". It sounds innocent somewhat like mails that would come from friends but you really ought to suspect something when the sender is not anyone you know.

The spams that has been wasting my partner's time are mails that promises enlargement of body parts, get rich business opportunities, medicines to improve sex drive, ladies claiming that they know you and inviting you to drop by their website to see photos of them without their clothes on.

From what I observe, it's easy to detect which are the nuisance ones. In my case, Norton Anti Virus does a good job in sieving out the innocent emails but with virus attachment. For my partner's case, his spams are usually from foreign sounding parties. It's bothersome to have to continually delete such emails.

I suppose the discussion on having an opt-in or opt-out system doesn't apply to the above cases. When you receive those emails in mountain loads, why would you still need to opt in. And who would dare to opt out now that most knows that you are only serving to confirm an active account by doing so.

These are emails that the authorities and internet providers should really clamp down on.

As for marketing mailers from local companies, I am more forgiving. For many business, it's a low cost method to promote their products and services.

I used to have an email account which somehow got into a database that I believed was sold to companies for marketing purposes. I have received one of those emails myself asking me whether I was interested to buy 500,000 for a surprisingly low cost! I had no use for it then. I have a small business now and I still wouldn't buy it because the emails holders in the database are probably not my target market. However, for a company who sells, general plumber service, onsite computer help or school test papers, I understand if this is one of the few economical methods available to them to spread the word about their products and services.

I have on a few occasions kept some emails which I thought might be useful for me in the future and many more occasions click on their unsubscribed function and indeed stopped receiving their mailers.

However, I'm not forgiving if they do not have an opt-out function, or one that is not working. For a period of time, I took it upon myself to "educate" companies who sent me unsolicited emails and yet didn't have the courtesy to give me a choice to opt out.

I have called companies up before to give them an earful on

1. Why there isn't an opt out function because I don't want to receive their email ever.
2. Why do you have an opt out function that is not working or with a mailbox that is full and throws my request to opt out back to me.
3. Why is that when I unsubscribe, I still keep getting their emails.

I end my telephone conversations telling them to take me out from their mailing list and I do not ever want to see any mails from them anymore.

Most apologise and promised to take my name out. For the defiant ones I told them they have left a bad impression on me. If I should ever need their products and services, I'll definitely be going to their competitor than buy it from them.

I have also reported such companies to their respective internet provider with the help of this website. http://www.fr1.cyberabuse.org/whois/?page=whois_server.

Pacific Net has a commendable abuse response team and that looks into my report, traces the offender and send out warnings. I have no reasons to doubt that they are patronisingly appeasing complainants and at the very least, they bothered to reply me.

I was asked to notify abuse@pacific.net.sg if the activity continues and I'm happy to say that I never had to do so.

I'm hoping that regulations would be put in place to still allow for companies to use this as a marketing tool and at the same time set up stricter policies and enforcement systems to ensure that Singaporeans can opt out if they would like.

There may come this problem where every company imaginable starts sending out emails to everyone. Regulations would then have to be put in to ensure that the sytem doesn't get abused.

Regards,
Jasmine Yeo