I was doubtful about the effectiveness of the proposed anti-spam legislation when I first heard about it, but I found the framework comprehensive and well thought-out after reading the joint IDA-AGC consultation paper on IDA's website.

From what I read, the main idea of the legislation is to stop spam coming from Singapore. While it is doubtful that the proposed legislation will reduce the amount of spam we are currently receiving, I applaud the altruistic approach that we are undertaking by stopping spam from our own country.

This is an approach which will only work if every country contributes in the fight against spam, and I am proud that we will be among the first to take the moral high ground.

The only low point about the framework is the opt-out scheme. The onus of deciding whether to reply to an opt-out address is entirely on the user and I think that it is extremely unfair.

For example, in Section 5.26(c) of the paper: "...users should not opt-out of spam with obviously false headers, misleading subject titles, ..."

How many users even know what a email header is, let alone the correct interpretation of the complex header information. A basic version of the header from Hotmail with my personal information crossed out shown below demonstrates how complex the header can be, and we will need the full version to authenticate the email's source.

MIME-Version: 1.0
Received: from xxxxxxxxxxxxx.com.sg ([xxx.xxx.xx.xxx]) by
xxx-xxx.xxxxxx.com with Microsoft SMTPSVC(5.0.2195.6824); Thu, 13 May 2004
07:06:48 -0700
Received: from xxxxxxxxx ([xxx.xxx.x.xxx]) by xxxxxxxxxxx.com.sg ; Thu, 13
May 2004 22:12:23 +0800 SGT
X-Message-Info: JGTYoYF78jHD8e6ntyhDfw6eCeU8LcIA
Message-ID: <001e01c438f3$c29e9e40$6f05a8c0@xx.xxxxxxxxx.com.sg>
X-MSMail-Priority: Normal
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook CWS, Build 9.0.2416 (9.0.2911.0)
X-MimeOLE: Produced By Microsoft MimeOLE V6.00.2800.1165
X-Rcpt-To: <xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.com>
Return-Path: xxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.com.sg
X-OriginalArrivalTime: 13 May 2004 14:06:49.0612 (UTC)
FILETIME=[88C644C0:01C438F3]

Another example in Section 5.26(d) of the paper: "... Where an opt-out request has been received, the sender should not transfer the e-mail address of the recipient in a manner contrary to his request, ..."

While this might not be a problem for opt-in scheme, how can the users trust the sender not to sell their email addresses to the other spammers when the users opts out? This is especially vexing for users who receives unsolicited emails from unknown

companies which may or may be be registered in Singapore.

The opt-out scheme might be too much of a bother for most users, and seems doomed to failure. One remedy might be to maintain a searchable database of "white-listed" opt-out addresses that users can trust. This database may initially only serve Singapore, and may expand to serve the international community as more countries enact anti-spam laws. The onus is thus back on the Government.

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