

Successful E-mail on an Internet Battered By Spam and Viruses

Organizations that provide e-mail service are struggling against a tide of unsolicited, bulk e-mail (spam) and e-mail laden with malicious code (viruses). An estimated 50 percent of the e-mail on the Internet is spam. Nearly 90 percent of the viruses infecting the Internet are e-mail borne. The communication tool we depend upon is under attack. Organizations are responding by aggressively filtering for spam and viruses.

What does this mean for the e-mail user? A year ago e-mail users needed one troubleshooting skill – is the address spelled correctly? An explosion of spam and viruses now requires users to have five troubleshooting skills:

1. **Is the e-mail too large?** Increasing use of e-mail, stagnant investment in infrastructure and the spam explosion have combined to fill e-mail servers to near-capacity. District 742 has responded to these challenges by blocking any e-mail message larger than 3 megabytes (MB). What does 3 MB mean? A four-paragraph, plain-text e-mail is typically 2 KB, or 0.00195 of a MB. A plain-text e-mail with an attached four-page MS Word document containing images might be 0.97043 of a MB. A plain-text e-mail with a large attached photo and MS Word document attached might run 2.8 MB.

Solutions: Split large files and attach them to multiple e-mail messages
Spread that batch of photos among several e-mail
Deliver large attachments on a CD

2. **Does the e-mail contain commercial solicitations?** District 742's filtering software scores incoming, outgoing and internal e-mail against a list of techniques used by unscrupulous e-mail marketers (spammers).

Solution: Avoid using e-mail services that embed or attach advertisements to your e-mail.

3. **Is the e-mail enhanced with background images, colored text, animated icons, HTML code, XML code or JavaScript code?** While these technologies can make for clever and eye-catching e-mail, they also are the tools of spammers and malicious programmers. District 742's e-mail system sends and accepts enhanced e-mail, including basic HTML e-mail.

Solution: Add fewer enhancements to your e-mail. If all else fails, send plain text.

4. **Are Joke-of-the-Day messages and chain-letters being blocked?** Novelty e-mail -- also know as "fun mail" -- uses many of the same techniques used by spammers. It also takes up storage space that could be better used by work-related e-mail.

Solution: Encourage correspondents to send fun mail to your home e-mail address.

5. **Does the blocked e-mail have a virus?** District 742 has two lines of defense against e-mail viruses. All incoming, outgoing and internal e-mail is scanned for viruses. Our classroom, lab, office and network computers are also scanned for viruses. Virus-laden messages are detected and destroyed.

Solution: Every computer on the Internet should have up-to-date virus protection.