



White Paper

Spam

&

The New Pony Express



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Spam and The New Pony Express

“The mail must go through! Hurlled by flesh and blood across two thousand miles of desolate space . . . neither storms, fatigue, darkness, mountains or Indians, burning sand or snow must stop the precious bags. The mail must go!”

— Alexander Majors, Pony Express founderⁱ

About Spam

Nowadays, the main thing that can go wrong with delivering email is that at some point along the trail your message may be interpreted as spam. It doesn't matter that *you* know you're not sending out spam, or that you and your recipient knows each other. As far as firewalls and filters are concerned, if it looks like spam, it's spam.

But that brings up a really good question: *Are you sending out spam?* Probably not—and if you use SoftVu's marketing communication platform, you already [agreed](#) not to, but there's no hard and fast definition of what exactly constitutes spam. In some people's opinion, spam is any kind of advertising in any medium—direct mail, TV and radio advertisements, commercial email—it's all spam. On the other end of the spectrum, bulk email advertisers say that it's not spam and you're not “spamming” so long as you provide a way for the viewer to “opt-out.” (Many employees within bulk emailers report that no such opt-out lists are kept or respected, and that opting out actually confirms that your email address is a valid one.)

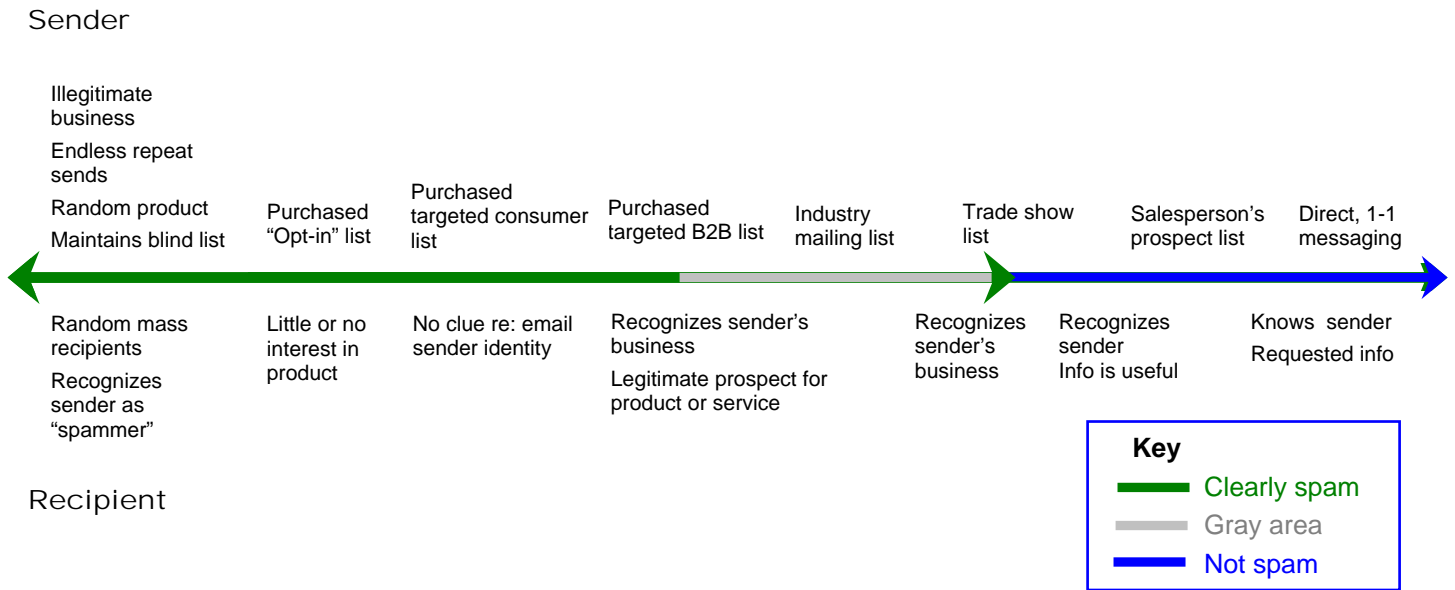
So, when is it spam?

Here's a good middle ground definition of “spam” and “spamming” from the Free On-Line Dictionary of Computing:

To indiscriminately send large amounts of unsolicited e-mail meant to promote a product or service. Spam in this sense is sort of like the electronic equivalent of junk mail sent to “Occupant”.ⁱⁱ

Currently, though, there's no clear consensus on what “spam” is or what constitutes “spamming.” In reality, whether a message is spam or not depends partly on the sender's action and intent, and partly on the recipient's perception of the sender and the sender's message. These actions fall along a kind of continuum as illustrated below.

Is it Spam?



What is Not Spam?

When you send commercial email messages to people with whom you have an established business relationship, you are not spamming. Though some gray areas remain, even in the commercial B2B arena—for instance, are you spamming when you send a message to:

- An entire trade show attendee list even though you may have met none or just a fraction of the attendees?
- Everyone on the contact list of the salesperson you replaced announcing that you're the new representative in the area?
- Everyone on an industry list (such as a list of attorneys belonging to a professional organization) that you know are users of your product?

Generally, it's acceptable in the business world to send out commercial email to known business associates and prospects within your business segment. Just be aware that not everyone has the same view.

Why is it called spam?



The term "Spam" originated from Hormel's Spiced Ham product of the same name. The Monty Python "[Spam](#)" skit may have helped move forward the notion of SPAM as a substance that imitates an original and is spread around everywhere. The term (not the product) originally referred to prank or otherwise inappropriate messages posted on a message board to incite or annoy. The current meaning, "To indiscriminately send large amounts of unsolicited e-mail meant to promote a product or service" is an extension of the original meaning, since many people find random, unsolicited commercial email equally annoying.ⁱⁱⁱ

Question: Can we spam with SoftVu? Answer: No.

While it is possible to use our platform to deliver an unsolicited message to bulk recipients outside your business contacts, all of SoftVu's users sign an End User Licensing Agreement ([EULA](#)) that forbids sending out "spam." Our users agree to send messages to only these three "permission-based" recipient types.

1. Express-permission Opt-In recipients. These recipients have directly "opted-in" to receive information from you or your organization. For example, web site visitors who complete a form indicating their interest in receiving more information.
2. Recipients that you have a prior 1-to-1 business relationship with. Examples include existing clients and any other potentials or prospects contacted previous to sending messages.
3. Recipients who have otherwise willingly submitted their contact information for contact purposes. Examples include trade-show attendees, trade-association members, etc. who indicate an interest in receiving information from suppliers in their industry.

SoftVu's Relay User Policy

Note: This portion of the Relay user agreement applies to distribution of emails. Current Relay users can access the complete user agreement in the Help section of the application.

SoftVu allows users of its Relay application to send permission-based emails, which SoftVu defines as email addresses that have been "opted-in" to mailing lists, email addresses that are used in 1-to-1 business communications, or email addresses that have otherwise been willingly submitted by its owner to the sender for contact purposes.

SoftVu explicitly states to every user of its Relay application that the distribution of unsolicited email is not permitted.

If you believe you have received an unwanted email from a user of Relay, please:

1. **forward a copy of the email to abuse@softvu.com and**
2. **be sure to include the person's name and company that sent you the Relay message**

SoftVu will closely scrutinize every reported offense, and, if requested, respond to you with answers to any questions as soon as possible.

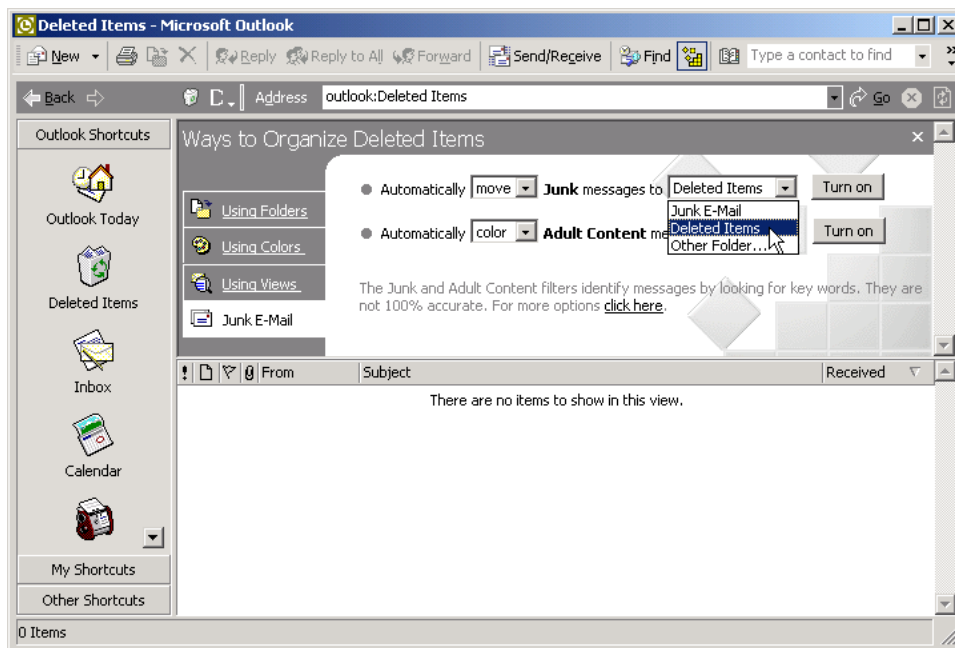
About Spam Filters

To combat unscrupulous "businesses" that randomly send out ads for rubbishy or otherwise dubious products, a whole group of technologies to counter spam have evolved. Most of these technologies can't differentiate between a legitimate marketing message and spam (for example, the spam filter of one Internet provider filters out such

things as church and club newsletters). Since the technology can't yet differentiate, legitimate businesses need to take steps to keep their messages, whether they're sent from an ASP, from Outlook, or from any other email program, from being blocked by a spam filter.

Spam filters don't just reject all email that contains a common marketing term or other spam attribute. Instead, they use a "weighting scheme" that assigns a value to particular words and phrases and considers other things like the occurrence of several emails with the same subject line, emails containing HTML codes, images, etc. The software then filters out email that exceeds a certain score.

The Microsoft Outlook "Junk E-Mail" filter



Understanding what types of messages spam filters look for, then taking a few steps to make sure your email doesn't fit the profile, helps ensure that your message makes it through to your recipient.

What can I do about it? Ten Tips

Here are ten tips to help your email marketing messages make it through spam filters and corporate firewalls to your recipient . . . and get opened and viewed.

1. **Follow the [SoftVu User Policy](#)**—the general rule is that you can only send messages to people with whom you have a legitimate business relationship.
2. **Call your recipient** to let them know you're sending something. Besides making it much less likely that your message will get thrown out with the junk mail, it gives you another reason to call and talk to your client or prospect.
3. **Double-check** that you have the correct recipient email address(es). This is probably the #1 reason that mail does not get through to the recipient.

4. **Put your name and company name on the Subject Line.** Personalizing your message lets your recipient know that the message contains information from a professional who might have something important for them—unlike spam offers which are completely random, impersonal, and of dubious value.
5. **Put your recipient’s name on the subject line.** Use SoftVu’s built in [FNAME] and [LNAME] tags to add your recipients’ first and/or last name to the subject line and in the body of your message. This is especially important when sending to multiple recipients in the same organization. Many spam filters weight heavily (or just plain block) multiple identical emails sent at or near the same time to the same domain.
6. **Try not to look like spam.** Avoid words and phrases that make your message look like spam. See the table below for some examples.

Avoiding the language of Spam

This table includes the criteria the [Microsoft Outlook Junk E-mail Filter](#)^{iv} currently uses to filter out “spam.” Some other common terms ranked by email filters^v words are also included. Suggested alternatives appear on the right.

Commonly filtered terms and symbols	Suggested replacement
affordable	inexpensive, reasonable
Bargain or best prices	excellent deal, good buy
\$ (dollar sign in subject line or body)	Best not to use; otherwise spell out "dollars" or replace with "money"
,000 (in subject line or body)	Best not to use; otherwise spell out "thousands" or "millions"
////////// (in body)	Best not to use.
100% satisfied (in body)	All of our clients say our product/service _____.
cards accepted (in body)	Best not to use, otherwise use "flexible ways to pay" or "accept all types of payment"
check or money order (in body)	Best not to use, otherwise use "flexible ways to pay" or "accept all types of payment"
extra income (in body)	Best not to use
for free! (in body)	Best not to use; otherwise use “complimentary” “no-cost” or “without cost”
for free? (in body)	Best not to use; otherwise use "free of charge" or "without cost"
Guarantee AND "satisfaction" OR "absolute" (in body)	Use "assured"
money back (in body)	Use ". . . or we will refund your payment in full"
money-back guarantee (in body)	Use ". . . or we will refund your payment in full"
"more info " AND "visit "	". . . to get all the details" "navigate to"

Commonly filtered terms and symbols	Suggested replacement
AND "\$" (in body)	
one-time mail (in body)	". . . the only mailing you will receive . . ."
order now! (in body)	"call soon to order"
order today (in body)	"call soon to order"
removal instructions (in body)	Use a link: I do not want to receive any further communications from XYZ corp.
SPECIAL PROMOTION (in body)	Use the name of the special promotion, instead: "Kick Start Program" "Start me up plan"
click here (in body)	"click" as in "click to learn how" "visit our website"
congratulations	Well done, kudos, "way to go," or be more specific in your praise
debt	obligations, bills, liability
financing	payment plan, financial arrangements to pay
free! for free?, for free! Or no obligation	free-of-charge, no-cost, cost-free
guaranteed	proven, certain, attested, affirmed, confirmed, insured
insurance	coverage, assurance, warranty, safeguard
investment	expenditure, expense, asset, grant
just released	new-improved
loan	loan-plan, lending
low interest	low risk, easy to purchase, friendly terms
new car	new automobile
opportunity	prospect opening, break, chance, occasion
paying too much	over expenditure
permanent low interest	competitive rates, preset rates
pre-approved	confirmed, already-qualified
special invitation	unique offer, proposal, a special proposition
free (in Subject field)	complimentary, no-cost
advertisement (in Subject field)	Do not put anything in the subject field that identifies your message as an ad.

* For a more complete example of how spam filters work, see this list of the [600 tests](#) conducted email by a popular open-source spam filter application.


7. **Send** messages only when you have **something new and important** to send.
8. For each follow-up message **use different subject line and message body text**.
9. **Follow-up** by phone to check whether the message was delivered.

10. Use **everyday, ordinary language**—avoid:

- Hype: “Get Rich Today” “Make Huge Money”
- All-caps and repeated punctuation marks: “GET RICH TODAY!!!” “MAKE HUGE MONEY!!!”
- Talking about money or using the \$ symbol (especially in the subject line): “\$\$\$ GET RICH TODAY!!! \$\$\$” “MAKE HUGE MONEY!!!” “100% ROI!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

What is SoftVu doing about it?

SoftVu takes great pains behind the scenes to make sure your message gets through. Users generally are unaware of the many strategies implemented to improve deliverability. To date, SoftVu has:

- Adopted Habeas email whitelisting and other email reputation protection technologies. 
- Secured its servers against use as “[open relay](#)” servers and keeps its servers off server “black-lists.”
- Worked with clients to help them avoid using language in email templates that might increase a spam filter score.
- Maintained a “[reliable, punctual and prompt](#)” opt-out list.
- Changed how email bounces are processed. We now return bounced emails to a generic address. Returning bounces to an address that includes the text “bounce” (as used to be common practice) can make the send address subject to filtering rules in some spam filters.
- Made bounce processing optional at the user level. Users can choose to have undeliverable notifications sent to their regular email client (such as Outlook) or processed within the SoftVu messaging platform.
- Reduced the occurrence of duplicate emails by providing for automatic message customization with [FNAME] and [LNAME] tags (replaced by the recipients first name and last name in the actual message) in subject line or body.
- Included an embedded text hyperlink to content in HTML-based messages. This hyperlink appears if HTML graphic elements are stripped out of an HTML formatted email by a mail filter or in the mail client.
- Made text the default email format. HTML messages are generally more appealing, but some mail filters block HTML formatted email.

SoftVu also keeps track of emerging industry standards and trends in commercial messaging.

Federal and State Legislation

SoftVu helps clients across the country in many different verticals with many different requirements, track and keep their email messaging in compliance with state and Federal legislation regarding commercial messaging. At the advent of the [Can Spam Act of 2003](#), SoftVu made a complete review of the capabilities of its messaging platform and determined that everything required for its clients to comply with the act was already in-place and operational in the platform.

SoftVu also complies with other [state laws regarding unsolicited commercial email](#) and regularly advises its clients on compliance issues.

“Industry Guidelines” outlining legitimate email marketing practices

Beyond legislation, the three main industry groups concerned with commercial Internet messaging ([Direct Marketing Association](#), [American Association of Advertising Agencies](#) and [Association of National Advertisers](#)) released [guidelines](#) prior to the passage of the Can Spam Act that spell out how legitimate commercial messaging should differ from spam.

SoftVu stays on top of legislation about commercial email messages and technologies that help legitimate companies use this important avenue of commerce, because, ultimately . . . “The mail must get through!”

ⁱ From <http://www.xphomestation.com/amajors.html>. Alexander Major’s home was in Kansas City: <http://www.nps.gov/safe/fnl-sft/photos/mopages/amajor.htm>.

ⁱⁱ The Free On-line Dictionary of Computing, <http://www.foldoc.org/>, Editor Denis Howe

ⁱⁱⁱ [Ibid]

^{iv} <http://office.microsoft.com/Assistance/9798/newfilters.aspx>.

^v Culled from a general Internet search.