

RANDOM

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THOUGHTS

I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid.

2003:03

Give me back my mailbox!

Spam is out of control. I do a fairly good job of protecting my e-mail addresses, but even protected addresses can fall into the hands of spammers. When that has happened in the past, there's been only one solution: stop using the address, create a new address, and notify everyone who should have the address.

That's a spectacular pain, for me and for everyone I correspond with.

When "wtvn@blinn.com" fell into the wrong hands, I thought about changing the address. But I like that address; it's

the one I use for Technology Corner on WTVN. It's on my website and business cards. It's my address, after all, not a spammer's!

About that time, I heard about a service called GoodbyeSpam and signed up for a trial account. That was about a week ago. The service doesn't provide perfect protection, but it's a massive improvement over anything I've seen before because it allows the user to whitelist (always allow) or blacklist (always block)

Last Checked at 3:20pm PT
Bill Blinn

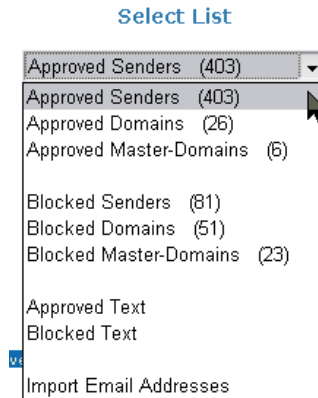
Number	Message Status (click to preview messages)
2	Inbox ?
4	New Quarantined Email ?
0	Old Quarantined Email ?
7	Blocked Email ?

With GoodbyeSpam, I check on-line occasionally to see what's been snared. If there's a quarantined message from somebody I know, I can free it immediately, and I can add information about spammers, spam domains, and common spam words to the program's filters.

Subject ?	Free Airline Tickets FREE PAY PER VIEWS Get Paid for hepatitis Huge Price Drops human growth hormone
Body ?	\$\$\$\$\$\$ % off on inkjet 0 YEARS YOUNGER 100% FREE 21 years old ADV:

I'm smart enough to know that nobody is giving away free airline tickets, that I have no interest in pay-per-view or human growth hormone, that any message with "\$\$\$\$\$\$" in it will always be trash, and that if I wanted inkjet supplies I'd buy from from a legitimate business that doesn't fill my mailbox with spam.

Block/Approve



I imported a list of people I expect to receive e-mail from and whitelisted several domains so that mail from friends will always get through. I also quickly identified some common spam addresses and domains that are at least "spam friendly". I don't want to hear from them - ever!

new correspondent writes to you, GoodbyeSpam sends a challenge that asks the sender to click a link. Since spammers often use stolen accounts and bogus return addresses, they never see the challenge; you never see their message.

Incoming messages that GoodbyeSpam can't definitively allow or reject are placed in quarantine. You can

individual addresses, subdomains, and domains. It also allows the user to pass or block messages with specific words in the header, the subject, or the body of the message.

To start, you feed the service all of the e-mail addresses in your address book so that the people you correspond with regularly won't see any change. When a

Action (click for All) None Remove Approve ?	Domain
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	1greatdeal.net
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	21cn.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	adelivery.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	amazingoffersdirect2u.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	be121.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	bestonthenetoffers.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	beyondoffers.net
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	bizrate.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	bol.com.br
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	businessvworld.com
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	centrum.cz
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	consumer1.net
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	dealpatrol.com

This is a partial list of domains I have blocked. No mail from these domains will ever reach my mailbox. Not all of the domains belong to spammers, but all are commonly used by spammers. If I blacklist a domain that I later want to whitelist, all I need do is select either "remove" or "approve".

NOW what??

Dead Trees seemed to be a somewhat negative name for this publication. Starting with this issue, the new name is *Random Thoughts*, suggesting - if not deep analytical articles - that at least minimal thought during development of the articles. Please note that I still bear no particular animosity toward trees.

examine these messages and approve or reject them. After a few days, you'll see fewer messages in quarantine and a sharp reduction in spam. I've decided to keep using wtvn@blinn.com and GoodbyeSpam has even allowed me to resurrect the master address for my Roadrunner account (wblinn@columbus.rr.com).

But I still take precautions with my address when I post in on the Technology Corner website. All it takes is a little Javascript to make an address that — to a human — looks and acts like an e-mail address invisible to a spambot.

Spambot?

Spammers have web-crawler software that follows links on pages from one page to another, from one site to another seeking anything that looks like a valid email address (spam.me@clueless.com, for example). The format is easy to spot and it's simple for an automated process to grab.

But spambots can't read Javascript. More accurately, they can read the Javascript (if they can find it) but an address can be disguised so that no spambot will be able to figure it out.

If you have a website and your address is posted "in the clear", now would be a good time to make sure that the address is in a separate Javascript file. Don't post the address in plain text even once.


An XP computer in your shirt pocket

What would you think of a computer that's about the size of a (large) deck of cards, weighs about 9 ounces, and runs Windows XP Professional on a 1GHz Crusoe TM5800 processor from Transmeta Corporation. There's a built-in VGA color LCD touchscreen and the computer comes with 256MB of RAM, a 10GB hard drive, FireWire and USB for connectivity, audio ports, and 802.11b and Bluetooth wireless networking.

Plug in a few external devices and you can export the video to a standard monitor, attach a mouse, and use a keyboard that's several times larger than the computer.

I'm describing OQO's "ultra-personal computer" and it would fit in your shirt pocket. If you could buy one. I first saw these devices nearly a year ago and, at that time, plans were to have units on sale by late 2002. Building prototypes is one thing; constructing devices that are rugged enough to work in the field and priced low enough for people to afford them has proven to be a problem. But the company continues to work on it.

OQO plans to make a special enclosure with a keyboard and screen. Plug the tiny computer in and you have a standard notebook computer — so it's three devices in one: palm-top, notebook, and desktop.

Founded in 1999, OQO is based San Francisco. For more information (but not much) see the company's website at www.oqo.com. 



All you have to do is break your address up into three pieces. Using the above example, those three pieces would be spam.me, clueless, and com. Then create a text file using UltraEdit or BBEEdit (or Notepad) that looks like this:

```
var nm = 'spam.me';
var dm = 'clueless';
var sf = 'com';
var as = '@';
var dt = '.';
function WriteMyAd()
{document.write('<a href="mailto:'
+nm+as+dm+dt+sf+'>'
+nm+as+dm+dt+sf+'</a>');}
```

Be certain that you don't include any line breaks between sets of 'single' quote marks. Also, remember to replace 'spam.me' with your e-mail user ID, 'clueless' with your domain, and 'com' with your top-level domain if it's something other than "com". Leave the single quote marks and the semi-colons alone. Save the file as "address.js" in the same directory with the rest of your website files.

In the <head> section of each website page, include this line to load the file:

```
<script language="JavaScript" TYPE="text/javascript"
SRC="address.js"></script>
```

Then, wherever you want your address to appear, include this little snippet of code (exactly as shown):

```
<script language="JavaScript"
TYPE="text/javascript">WriteMyAd();</script>
```

So you might have a section that looks like this: Send me an e-mail if you wish. My address is <script language="JavaScript" TYPE="text/javascript">WriteMyAd();</script>. And that's all the spambot will see.

People who are reading the website will see this: **Send me an e-mail if you wish. My address is spam.me@clueless.com.** In other words, people will see and be able to use a functional link.

More defense

I have a lot of e-mail addresses — about 70 at last count. Most of them are just "forwarders". When a message arrives for *bogus.address@blinn.com*, it is forwarded to my collector address. In place of "bogus.address" I use something that will identify the address as being associated with a company or service.

Let's say I sign up for the "SmithJones" company's e-mail newsletter. Instead of giving the company my real address, I would give them "smithjones@blinn.com". All messages to that address will be forwarded to my collector account and I'll see them as I would any other message.

But if the SmithJones company turns out to be an unscrupulous spammer, I'll know about it right away. The instant I see spam addressed to "smithjones@blinn.com" I'll know that the company sold my name. I can then kill the address (no more spam) and tell SmithJones that I don't want to deal with them.

If you don't have your own domain, you can use a modified version of this strategy by giving your real address only to those you know will treat it with respect and then using a throwaway address (from Hotmail, Yahoo, or a similar service) when you sign up for products and services on the Web. 