nLightened Thoughts

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# The Delightful Odor of Frying Spam

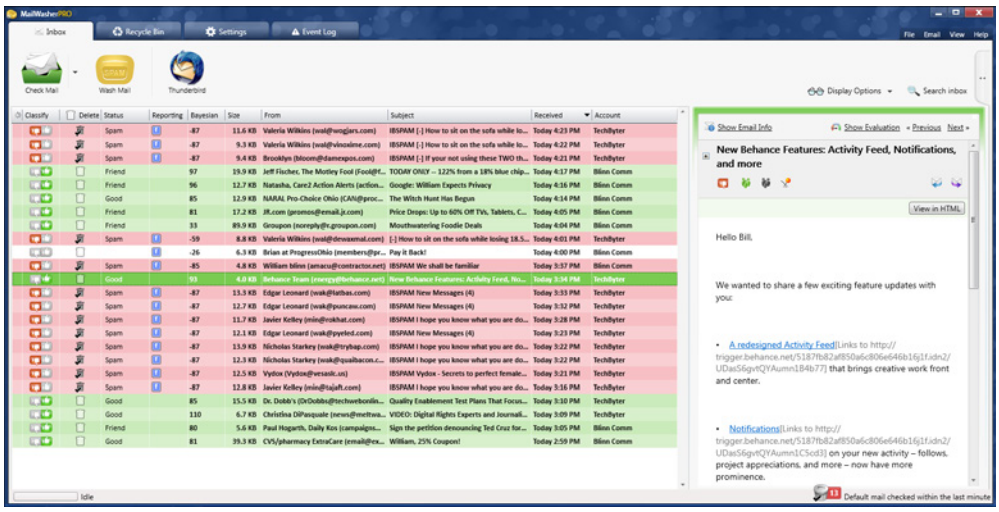
## Some estimates suggest that 80% to 90% of all e-mail is spam. Much of it is identified and eliminated before it reaches your ISP's server, but a lot of it still gets through. A programmer in New Zealand has a solution.

Some people try to identify spam with filters in their e-mail program, but these filters are time consuming to maintain and the spam needs to be downloaded to your computer before it can be filtered. Other anti-spam measures attempt to identify spam on the server and I had installed some domain-level filters at that level. These filters can identify obvious spams and delete them based on the content of the message.

Server-side filters delete spams before they get to your computer, but you still need to update the filter list regularly and you need to know at least a little bit about writing what are called *regular expressions* that are used in the message examination.

When the number of spams that made it through my defenses increased considerably, I started looking for an application that would help to eliminate them. After finding nothing, I updated the server-side filters to include a dozen or so new terms. The spam flood decreased to a dribble again, but this kind of improvement won't last because the regular expressions need to be updated every few days.

Then I discovered MailWasher, installed the free version, and almost immediately realized that this was the application I had been looking for. A one-time $30 fee covers 3 computers and any number of portable devices. The Android application isn't very good and developer Nick Bolton says he's rewriting it. The Windows application, however, is a gem.




**Messages shown in red (thumb down) are believed to be spam, while those shown in green (thumb up) are thought to be good. When a message isn't color coded, it's because MailWasher couldn't decide. The user can click either thumb up or thumb down and also choose to delete any message without downloading it. The panel on the right shows the content of the selected message.**

It's rare for me to dedicate an issue of nLightened Thoughts to a single application, but I'm convinced that MailWasher Pro is the right application for anyone who has too much spam.

MailWasher examines spam when it's still on the server, so you'll never download another spam-filled message if you don't want to. The application uses various strategies to identify spam. For example, the address of anyone you communicate with will be added to your list of friends, you can add other addresses to a blacklist, MailWasher can examine the language setting and mark as spam those messages in languages you don't speak, anti-spam organizations (SpamCop, Sapmhaus, and FirstAlert) can be queried, and you can even write your own filters if you want to. These are all combined to examine every message on the server.

The messages are then shown as OK (thumb up), spam (thumb down), or unknown. If the message is OK or unknown, MailWasher will suggest allowing it to pass. Spam is marked for deletion. You can change any of the settings for any message and then click Wash Mail to delete the junk so you don't have to download it.

Because messages can be previewed in MailWasher, I find that I'm able to read and delete trivial messages on the server. For example, if you subscribe to a mailing list of some sort, you

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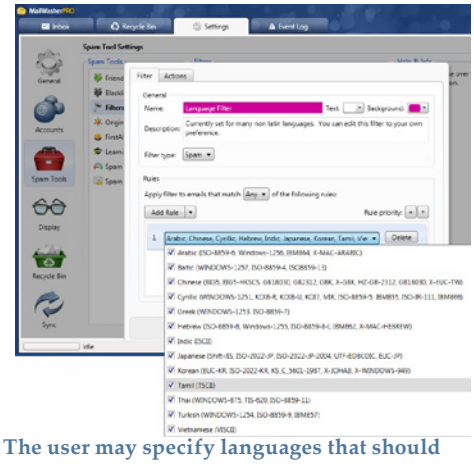
can read the messages in MailWasher and then download only those messages that you want to keep or reply to.

## Spam's Many Flavors

Spam comes in many varieties. Some is just designed to convince the user to visit a website or to collect the millions of dollars available from a prince in one of the poorest nations on earth. Others come with malware that will attempt to plant a keylogger or some other malevolent application on your computer. One is annoying, the other is potentially destructive.

MailWasher Pro protects against all types of spam, but it's particularly helpful in eliminating malware. Because the spam is deleted from the server and never reaches your computer, you don't have to worry about dangerous attachments somehow being retained on the computer.



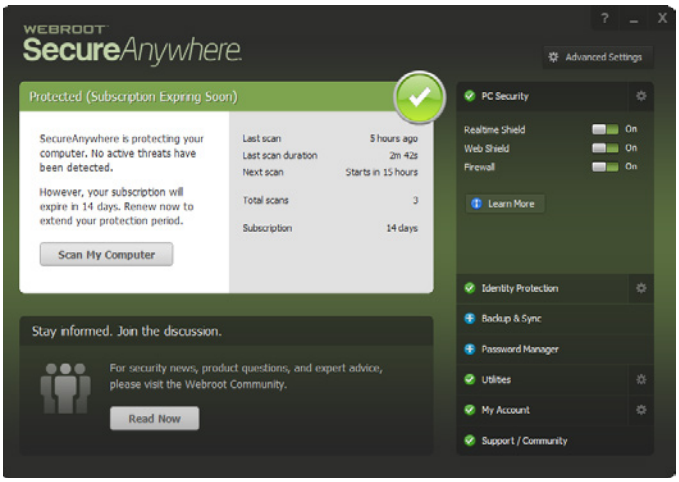
**The user may specify languages that should always be considered spam. Those who cannot read Chinese, Russian, Hebrew, Thai, or Korean can safely delete messages in those languages. This setting can, however cause MailWasher to mark as spam messages from people who use a non-English setting but write in English. This is resolved by adding the writer to your list of friends.**

Because e-mail is such a routine communication method, it feels familiar and safe, yet it is possibly the single most common vector for distributing viruses and other malware, either by sending the malware as an attachment or by including a link to a compromised website.

It's never been more important to protect your computer and yourself from the thieves who see the Internet as their playground. MailWasher makes the process a lot easier. Ω

# Protecting Your Computer

## Procedures to protect computers have changed considerably since the early days of desktop computing and the rate of change is not slowing.




In the 1980s, when antivirus applications were updated once or twice per year, I said that protective applications weren't necessary unless you downloaded a lot of software from sketchy bulletin board systems. This, of course, was before Internet connections were readily available. Your point of view probably has changed several times since then; I know that mine has.

With the advent of the Internet, it was clear that everyone needed antivirus protection. Companies that made these products started updating them several times per year, then monthly, and now updates can occur several times per day.

Around the turn of the century, I began expecting operating system manufacturers (primarily Microsoft and Apple) to bring antivirus protection in house and include it as part of the operating system. That seemed to be the most logical approach because the people who wrote the operating system would seemingly know the most about how to protect it.

Microsoft's Security Essentials (MSE) appeared to be that product from Microsoft and, initially, it was a strong contender. Over the years, though, it has not kept up with the changing menagerie of threats. MSE is not a core function for Microsoft, so it probably doesn't receive the resources it needs. At Symantec, Avast, McAfee, and all of the other providers of protective software, protecting computers is the core business and even the free offerings from those companies offer better protection than MSE does.

I've been using the free version of Avast for several years and the definitions are updated at least daily. When I installed Windows 8.1, Avast was disabled. The diagnostic message simply said that Avast "couldn't start". Windows noticed that no protective measures were in place and activated MSE. I'm probably careful enough to survive with MSE, but it's easy enough to make a mistake, so I started looking around.

After talking with Chip Witt of Webroot about protection from phishing attacks, I decided to give Webroot a try. Webroot is a cloud-based, crowd-sourced system of protective applications. My opinion now is that a cloud-based system makes far more sense than a service offered either by the operating system developer or by outside vendors that aren't cloud-based.

The company offers licenses that cover a single computer as well as reasonably priced plans that cover 5 computers. Unlike most other protective measures, Webroot coexists well with other antivirus and antimalware applications. Ω