

The scam in spam

A recent FICCI study estimates that about 60 per cent of all e-mails in India are spam messages and around 50 per cent mail storage space is hogged by them



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When was the last time you received an e-mail with the subject line: "Here's your file" — only to discover it was a spam mail? While nobody quite knows how the word "spam" was coined, nearly everybody is familiar with the junk mail that often clogs mailboxes, or at times, crashes systems altogether!

Stamp out spam! That's the urgent message conveyed in a recent report released by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The study proposes various ways and means (legislative, as well as administrative features such as software filters installed at vendor end) for blocking spam, which has become a huge menace for Internet-users, ISP providers and businesses in India. It is estimated that despite the low Internet penetration in the country, we generate close to 100 million e-mails a day, of which 60 per cent could be spam mails!

The FICCI report estimates that e-mail addresses are easily available for as little as Rs 5000 a list, on the basis of which a single spammer can dispatch about 200 million messages a day!

Hotmail claims it blocks more than three billion spam messages per day, a figure which is expected to rise to 58 billion in 2005, costing businesses the world over a loss of US\$ 98 billion annually.

Spam is any unsolicited commercial electronic mail that is sent out in bulk to unsuspecting e-mail users. Spam represents a major revenue loss to providers of Internet access services, businesses, and educational and non-profit institutes that carry and receive such mail, as there is a finite volume of mail that these agencies can handle at their end without further investment in their infrastructure.

To counter spam mail, however, there are scores of client-based tools, such as McAfee, Symantec Anti Spam, Spam Killer and Spam

Inspector as well as server-based strategies, such as Spam Assassin, Mail Frontier, Rules Engine etc., but the unfortunate fact is that none of these filters are able to make a system 100 per cent spam proof.

Additionally, there is the risk of children's exposure to offensive material through spam, as most spam messages are loaded with porn, fraudulent offers, viruses, worms etc. The fact that a spammer's identity can easily be masked, makes spam a popular mass communication medium for advertising illegal activities on the Net.

At present, India does not have any law on spam. The Information Technology Act, 2000 is also silent on the issue, while more developed countries have already come out with legislative solutions such as the CAN-SPAM Act in the US and the Australia Spam Act, 2003 in Australia. An Australian report in fact reveals that the volume of spam has increased six times in 2001 alone.



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Ficci for law against spam

New Delhi: FICCI has called for framing an anti-spam legislation to safeguard internet as an effective and safe communication tool. Lists of email addresses are available for less than Rs 5,000 and over 100 million e-mails are generated every day in India.

E-mail volume globally exceeded one billion GB in 2003; for a country like India, internet's importance is further increased because it is extremely cost effective, fast mode and boundary less communication tool.

Such a law has become imperative as the incidence of spam and its rampant increase threatens to seriously undermine the popularity of email and other internet tools for the conduct of business, it said.

Ficci said increasing spam would lead to serious problem for the popularity of email and other tools of Internet affecting the global business. The costs to consumers in India would potentially be higher and it is imperative to prevent spam in India before it becomes a widespread problem.

Ficci has pointed out that the efficacy of the proposed legislation would have to be judged in terms of its ability to decrease the volume of spam; lower costs to consumers, ISPs, and businesses; greater consumer control over whether and how to receive, filter or delete messages; broader commercial adoption and enforcement of email best practices; and minimal disruption of existing commercial relationships between businesses and consumers.

The law would have to bear in mind specific issues such as the definitional aspect of spam, privacy, content and jurisdiction, etc. while drafting an anti-spam bill suitable for India, Ficci said. — PTI

FICCI calls for legislation to curb growing spam on Net

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Press Trust of India
New Delhi, January 16

WITH SPAM now making up 70 per cent of all e-mails sent across the globe, FICCI has called for framing an anti-spam legislation to safeguard internet as an effective and safe communication tool.

Lists of email addresses are available for less than Rs 5,000 and over 100 million e-mails are generated every day in India. Between 30-70 per cent of all these are attributed to spam and around 50 per cent of mail storage is hogged by it, a FICCI study said. Globally it is estimated that over 60 per cent of all e-mail constitutes spam, and Hotmail blocked approximately three billion spam messages per day out of the approximately 14.5 billion spam messages sent each day.

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Given the imperfections of the anti-spam filtering software employed by ISPs, FICCI has advocated that the war against spam would require a multi-pronged approach comprising technology delivery and adoption, industry initiatives and self-regulation, policy and legislation, strong and informed enforcement and consumer education as the best way forward in dealing with the menace.