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AUSNETECH NEWS

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Controlling spam and viruses

It seems the more we use and rely on computers and the Internet, the more prone we are to the negative aspects of that usage.

Two of the big negatives are unsolicited commercial email (UCE, junk mail, or Spam) and computer viruses.

These can both be huge time-wasters, but with the right precautions taken, they can be controlled.

Spam

Spam is usually more annoying than damaging, but there is still quite a bit of harm that can eventuate from spam:

- ◆ It fills up hard disk space, on both desktop/client machines, and also email servers.
- ◆ It clogs up backbones and other smaller routes on the Internet – slowing everything down.
- ◆ It can carry nasties like spyware and viruses (more info on the back of this card).
- ◆ It wastes our time and resources, sifting through junk emails, perhaps accidentally discarding genuine mail.

So, what's to be done? It seems whenever we come up with new techniques to avoid spam, the spammers are one step ahead of us with the tricks to get their junk mail through.

A relatively new, anti-spam mechanism sweeping through the Internet world

now, is **SPF (Sender Policy Framework)**, see: <http://spf.pobox.com>).

Although optional, ISPs and email providers are strongly being encouraged to participate in this system, whereby they publish the details of the servers that send out email from their domains. This allows servers receiving the emails to reject mail that doesn't come from those published servers (which is often a trick used by spammers).

Other anti-spam methods are still important, for now. Spam can and should be controlled on the server, as well as the client – for optimum effectiveness. Work with your ISP or your email provider to ensure you're well armed in the fight against spam.

Viruses

Those who have had their computers infected by viruses, know of the pain and frustration they can cause, let alone the damage.

Viruses can cause harm by:

- Deleting files
- Causing odd behaviour in programs
- Rebooting the machine
- Slowing the system . . .



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They can reinfect your computer, or propagate to other computers on your network or through email and the Internet.

It's easy to be lax if you've never been infected before, but complacency in this area can be dangerous to your own computer, and others.

Adopt a strategy that helps combat viruses by:

- Installing anti-virus software on all PC's in your business.
- Ensuring the anti-virus program is updated with the latest release.
- Using virus-protection on your email server.
- Keeping your operating system patches up to date (for example: by running Windows Update)
- Never opening emails and especially email

attachments, if you don't know the source

- Trying alternate programs, like Mozilla (instead of Internet Explorer and Outlook)
- Trying alternate operating systems, like Linux – which has a better inbuilt security system and is less prone to viruses.
- Being vigilant!

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Checklist for controlling spam and viruses

- ✓ Make sure your ISP or email provider is responsible enough to **participate in the SPF**.
- ✓ Work with your mail service provider on implementing spam and virus control **on the server**.
- ✓ Always do your operating system updates (eg. **Windows Updates**).
- ✓ Use **virus-scanning software** regularly, and keep it updated with the latest virus controls.
- ✓ Just like terrorism, **be vigilant** against viruses – don't open strange email attachments!