

E-Mail Courtesies to Help Prevent Spam

Recently we had to change some e-mail addresses due to a high volume of spam. Please help us prevent spam by keeping the following courtesies in mind when using e-mail:

- Do not forward chain mail.
- Do not get fooled by Internet hoaxes and computer virus myths.
- Use the “bcc” (blind courtesy copy) function when sending mail to large numbers of people.
- Do not provide e-mail addresses to third-party companies.
- Do not display (or link to) actual e-mail addresses online.
- Do not use e-mail instead of a phone call, especially if it is important or time-sensitive.

Below please find additional information about each of the categories mentioned above:

Do not forward chain mail

Some messages appear to have good intentions (e.g., fly the flag, pray for a cure, help a charitable cause, etc.) and ask that you forward them to other people. Don't. Most people hate getting this type of mail and consider unsolicited messages to be “junk mail” or “spam” (if you received such mail in your “snail mail” box, you would not even think twice about trashing it). This also slows down Internet networks and is generally a waste of valuable, limited resources. Most important, if incorrectly addressed, puts everyone's e-mail address in the message for everyone else to see (and potentially forward on to others, etc.)

Solution: Keep all messages simple and to a select group of people. Delete chain mail upon receipt and do not forward.

Do not get fooled by Internet hoaxes and computer virus myths

There are messages warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer. Do not believe it. All of them are hoaxes. Sometimes these hoaxes contain viruses themselves, by attaching a so-called file that will stop the “dangerous virus.” Even if the content “seems” to be ok, the senders often are not.

Solution: Delete these e-mails as soon as you receive them and preferably without even opening them. And certainly do not forward them to others!

Use the “bcc” function when sending mail to large numbers of people

If it is necessary to send an e-mail to a large number of people, do not paste the e-mail addresses into the “cc:”(courtesy copy) field (or worse yet, the “To:” field) of your e-mail program. If you do that, each person you are writing to will be able to see the e-mail addresses of all the other people you are writing to. This can be very annoying as people usually do not like to disclose their e-mail address in public. The potential exists for the e-mail addresses to get into the wrong hands, thereby starting e-mail chain letters and spam.

Solution: Use the “bcc” (blind courtesy copy) function instead. Place all addresses in the “bcc:” field and your own address in the “To:” field. That way each person will only see their own e-mail address (as well as yours).

Do not provide e-mail addresses to third-party companies

There are Web sites that people can go to send “e-cards” or “online greetings” to others (for example, birthdays, holidays, special occasions, etc.) These types of online “services” hang on to your e-mail address as well as the address or any recipients and will start sending out junk mail. They will most likely will share, or even sell, the e-mail addresses to other companies for the same purpose (and then those companies will share them, etc.) The first time this happened to me I called up the sender and said thanks, but now my junk mail will increase by 10% simply by their one action. (And it did...by 20%!)

Solution: Do not willingly give your e-mail address or that of others to third-party companies. To express your sentiments, simply e-mail the intended recipient.

Do not display (or link to) actual e-mail addresses online

A lot of people overlook this one. There are “spider” programs that crawl through the Internet searching Web sites for e-mail addresses so that they can send out spam. If you have a Web site, or an online newsletter (e.g., a PDF file or Word document), do not display e-mail addresses, and do not place them in the actual html code nor hyperlink them.

Solution: Disguise the e-mail address by putting it in an image file, or by not displaying the “at” sign. For example, instead of “webmaster@xyz.com” you could say “webmaster (at) xyz.com.” This forces the user to manually type in the actual e-mail address in their e-mail program. This helps to reduce spam considerably as the “spider” programs that crawl through the Internet rarely (if ever) detect this.
