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Spammers don't go away, just get smarter

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Tough laws, new codes of practice and improved technology have not stopped the spammers, only made them smarter.

For IT organizations it is an ongoing battle. Accounting firm BDO Kendalls' IS director Michael Axelsen says the problem "is getting worse" instead of better.

Axelsen said spammers are more insidious in their phishing expeditions and it means internal resources are being directed to a non-productive activity. He estimates 30 to 40 percent of e-mail is spam, which is wasting a lot of bandwidth.

_DAY 23:

_We're under attack!
Poor collaboration is devouring our productivity.

_Gil is hoping the problem will just go away.

▶ Click and drag it away.

And while the organization uses anti-spam software and subscribes to black lists, Axelsen said end users still waste a lot of time deleting unwanted mail.

"It would be great if it could go away the way vendors are claiming it can be done; I'm not sure if charging Internet service providers (ISPs) is a practical solution," he said.

Australia is introducing a new code of practice for companies providing or enabling e-mail services from July 16, 2006, to support the Spam Act of 2003.

Under the code, Australia's 689 active ISPs and other groups providing e-mail services will share responsibility for helping fight spam. The companies must offer spam-filtering options to their subscribers, provide them with information about how to deal with spam, and have a process for dealing with complaints.

Intercontinental Hotel IT manager Ben Wrigley believes there has been a 100 percent increase in activity in the past 12 months despite the use of various software solutions. Wrigley blames the ease of use of downloading spamming tools, but says prosecution has become more effective.

He has looked at managed services, but says it isn't cost-effective.

"Through fine-tuning we have reduced false positives pretty much to zero," Wrigley added.

Western Australia's Curtin University of Technology senior systems engineer Kevin Manning said the problem got a lot worse before it got better.

Manning runs a number of different systems and recently moved the university's 3000 staff over to Symantec's BrightMail and has seen big improvements.

Previously, the university just ran a heuristic engine, but spam got worse and manual keyword updates were required.

Vinidex & MM Electrical Merchandising IT manager, Trevor Batten, said the spam problem escalated about 12 months ago accounting for 20 percent of all e-mails at the company. With 1600 users, Batten said using a managed service was the most economical solution.
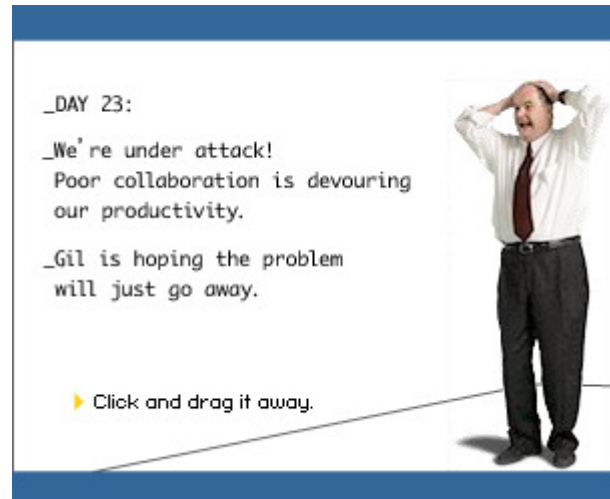
He said Verizon Business (formerly MCI) came on board 10 months ago and it is almost 100 percent effective.

Kevin Salter, head of IT support at Brisbane-based accounting firm Moore Stephens, said that over a single weekend the company's filtering software picks up about 2500 unsolicited e-mails. But as a Clearswift MIMEsweeper user, Salter said the problem is manageable.

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