



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Checking it Out

Warning: Your Email is a Spam Magnet



By Steve Tuzeneu

[May 2019] Email these days is, like your phone, plagued by marketers and scammers. Finding ways to overcome the problems is not hard. Some ideas? Steve Tuzeneu has a few.

I expect when you read that headline you thought, “Huh? I don't think so.” Nevertheless, whatever you are thinking, you and your station may be doing things in such a way as to make your email address a spam magnet.

INCOMING

Have you ever checked your email at the station and thought: “Where is all this spam coming from?”

If you are like most people, you do not spread your email address all over the Internet, but you are still getting all those obnoxious Viagra and Cialis offers practically every day. Or how about the really trashy stuff like the girl who invites you to see her newly posted pictures? Those disgust me. I know where they are going with *that* one.

The funniest spam I get is from the “dear old lady” who wants to leave me twenty million dollars to do the work of the Lord. I also get

emails informing me that I am the beneficiary of a huge estate, and all I have to do is send them my contact details. Yeah right! Can you say “scam?”

YOU MAY HAVE DONE IT!

So how did these people get your email address in the first place?

Well, the answer might be very simple: you may be among those who posted it on the station's website! That is correct! It may be out there where everyone can find it and add it to a mailing list. Large numbers of people visit your website and copy email addresses manually for their own use or to sell to someone else. Other people use software to capture your email address from your website.

Did you know that companies sell software that harvests emails from websites every day? As I write this article, I have an advertisement open in my browser. It is from a company called Lead Tools Direct, based in Rockland, California. They sell software for a one-time fee of \$79.00 which extracts email addresses and contact information from websites all over the Internet.

Other software targets social media. One deal the scammers truly love is the people who put 150 or more addresses in the To: field. Yes, it is easy to buy this kind of software to target businesses or consumers.

PROTECTION

By now you must be thinking, “What can I do about this?” An excellent question.

For starters, do not post anyone's email address on your website – remove those e-mail addresses right away. As mentioned before, software robots are working around the clock to collect those addresses.

Instead, like many businesses today, use a form. Some companies and radio stations will send visitors to another page when they click on the “contact” link. On that page is a form where they enter their name and email address, and below that, in a text box, the message they wish to send.

But before you can do that, you need to get a thing called a “CAPTCHA” page.”

CAPTCHA

Have you ever encountered a page that says “check box” or “copy the display” to prove you are not a robot?

For the definition and a visual display of what a “CAPTCHA” is, visit: www.captcha.net.

On that site, you will get a bit of history and an explanation of why it is used. If you do not have it already, this would be an excellent tool to use on your website to drastically cut down on

spam. Since “robots” cannot read images, they cannot fill out your CAPTCHA form and send you spam.

In addition, you may wish to close out some email addresses and create new ones. Instead of john@wnut.com, you may need to delete that one and create a new one for John something like this: jsmith@wnut.com.

While john is likely on every “dictionary attack” list, jsmith will be much less likely so. Add a number (jsmith1240) and you will almost never be found on a dictionary list.

It may take a visit with your station's webmaster, some time to set up a contact page with the “CAPTCHA” feature installed, and a policy of keeping staff emails private, but it will be worth the time and effort when you do not have to spend time busily deleting mail you do not want.

ONCE THEY HAVE YOUR ADDRESS

It is very difficult – some would say “impossible” to get off these spam mailing lists once your email address has been passed around to other spammers.

Sadly, if your email address has been grabbed, a spam filter (warning: false positives abound!) or an email name change may be the only solution. If it is relatively new, the steps I have mentioned will help put a stop to a large part of it.

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