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PHP Add Captcha Protection To Web Forms

Posted by Vivek Gite <vivek@nixcraft.com>

I own a small business website. However, bots started to abusing my forms such as contact.php. How do I stop bad bots from abusing my site? How do I tell if PHP form is submitted by a person or a script? [1]

You need to use a Captcha, which is nothing but a type of challenge-response test used by you to ensure that the response is not generated by a bot. There are plenty of libraries provided for PHP. I recommend the reCAPTCHA PHP Library, which provides a simple way to place a CAPTCHA on your PHP forms. It can stop bots from abusing it. you need to use the reCAPTCHA API.

Step # 1: Get reCAPTCHA API Library

Visit reCAPTCHA website to sign up [2] for an API key (it is free). Please note down your private and public keys.

Step # 2: Download and Install reCAPTCHA PHP

Download the reCAPTCHA library [3] from Google code repo:

```
$ cd /tmp
$ wget http://recaptcha.googlecode.com/files/recaptcha-php-1.10.zip
```

Unzip recaptcha-php-1.10.zip, enter:

```
$ unzip [4]  recaptcha-php-1.10.zip
```

Finally, copy recaptchalib.php to the directory where your forms live. For e.g. if your contact.php is at /var/www/html, copy recaptchalib.php as follows:

```
$ cp /tmp/recaptcha-php-1.10/recaptchalib.php /var/www/html
```

Step # 3: Test It

Create a php script as follows:

```
<html>
<head>
 <title>Sample Email Form</title>
</head>
<body>

<script>
    function checkForm() {
 if (document.forms.myphpform.elements['yname'].value.length == 0) {
  alert('Please enter a value for the "Name" field');
         return false;
     }
 if (document.forms.myphpform.elements['email'].value.length == 0) {
  alert('Please enter a value for the "Email" field');
         return false;
     }
 if (document.forms.myphpform.elements['message'].value.length == 0) {
  alert('Please enter a value for the "Message" field');
         return false;
     }

     return true;
```

```php
    }
</script>
<form action="?done=1" method="post" name="myphpform" onSubmit="return checkForm()"  >
<table border=0>
<tr>
<td>Your Name:</td>
<td>
<input type="text" name="yname" size="50" maxlength="50" value="" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Email:</td>
<td>
<input type="text" name="email" size="50" maxlength="50" value="" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message:</td>
<td>
<input type="text" name="message" size="50" maxlength="50" value="" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you a human being?</td>
<td>
<?php

@require_once('recaptchalib.php');
$publickey = "YOUR-PUBLIC-KEY";
$privatekey = "YOUR-PRIVATE-KEY";

$resp = null;
$error = null;

# are we submitting the page?
if ($_POST["submit"]) {
  $resp = recaptcha_check_answer ($privatekey,
                                  $_SERVER["REMOTE_ADDR"],
                                  $_POST["recaptcha_challenge_field"],
                                  $_POST["recaptcha_response_field"]);

  if ($resp->is_valid) {
 $to="you@example.com";
 $subject="Feedback from example.com";
        $body=" Message via webform:

Name: " .$_POST["yname"] . "\n

Email: " .$_POST["email"] . "\n

Message: " .$_POST["message"] . "\n";
        /*  send email */
 mail [5]($to,$subject,$body);
 echo [6] "

Email sent!

";
 exit [7](1);

  } else {
      echo [6] "Sorry cannot send email as you've failed to provide correct captcha! Try ag
  }
}
echo [6] recaptcha_get_html($publickey, $error);
?>
<td/>
 </tr>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td>
<input type="submit" name="submit" value="submit" /></td>
```

```
    </tr>
    </table>
    </form>

    </body>
    </html>
```

Sample Output:

[8]

Fig.01: PHP Captcha in Action

You can see working captcha example by visiting this url [9].

Further readings:

- The official recaptcha [10] website.

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URLs in this post:

[1] Image: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/category/php/**
[2] sign up: **http://recaptcha.net/api/getkey?app=php**
[3] reCAPTCHA library: **http://code.google.com/p/recaptcha/downloads/list?q=label:phplib-Latest**
[4] unzip: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/tips/how-can-i-zipping-and-unzipping-files-under-linux.html**
[5] mail: **http://www.php.net/mail**
[6] echo: **http://www.php.net/echo**
[7] exit: **http://www.php.net/exit**
[8] Image: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/php-captcha-class-simple-php-captcha-example/php-captcha/**
[9] visiting this url: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/email.php?hash=1&url=http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/php-captcha-class-simple-php-captcha-example/&subject=PHP%20Add%20Captcha%20Protection%20To%20Web%20Forms**
[10] recaptcha: **http://recaptcha.net**