



Village of the spammed

For some, **unwanted email** is the bane of their lives. Nigel Whitfield puts it into perspective.

Thanks to the many readers who wrote and pointed out, after I said you couldn't access HotMail with a standard mail reader, that Outlook Express 5 allows you to do so; a conspiracy of deadlines meant that by the time the magazine appeared, you were all right, but when the answer was written, I was correct!

However, extra thanks to those readers who pointed out CwebMail <www.cwebmail.com>, which works with a number of web mail services, and HotPop <www.hotpop.com>, which gives free POP accounts.

HTML, take note

Readers of the book *HTML in Easy Steps*, by Chris Russell, will have been directed away from programs such as FrontPage Express for creating web pages and towards simple word processors like Windows Notepad to code their pages.

Converting the Notepad file to HTML couldn't be simpler. All you need to do when you want to save a file as HTML is give it the appropriate extension, either .html or .htm. When Notepad gives you a choice of the type of file in the Save dialogue box, choose 'All files (*.*)' and then simply type the name of the file, ending with .html.

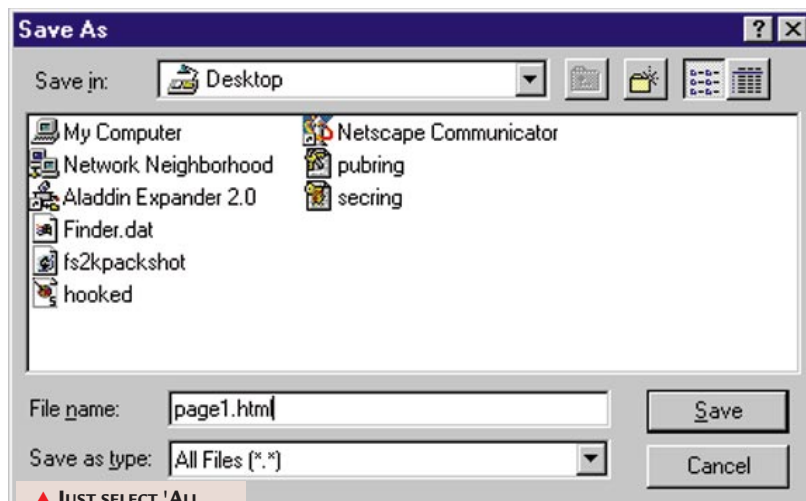
Incidentally, other readers who want to learn the basics of HTML can find an old PCW feature on the subject (written long before even frames were commonplace) at public.diversity.org.uk/webtutorial/.

A spammer in the works

Usenet users will be aware of the problems of receiving frequent spam. Some of you have even expressed a desire to exact revenge on the spammer.

One approach, suggested in a newsgroup, was to post the spammer's email address to alt.spam and other spam-associated newsgroups which bots would pick up. Then the spammer would get spammed by other spammers.

The question is whether subscribing the spammer to lots of discussion would be allowed: would an ISP tolerate this?



▲ JUST SELECT 'ALL FILES' AS THE TYPE WHEN YOU WANT TO SAVE A WEB PAGE WITH NOTEPAD, AND USE THE .HTML EXTENSION

While I can't see much wrong with posting a

spammer's address to a newsgroup, I do think that subscribing people to a list without their permission is a very bad idea. I host several lists myself, and one of the biggest problems is people thinking that someone will be interested in a list, and then having to sort out the mess when someone can't figure out how to unsubscribe themselves.

On lists where only members can post, adding a spammer's address potentially means that they can then spam that list. It also means you may generate lots of messages on a list as someone tries to unsubscribe, and frankly is likely to be just as disruptive to the list as it is to the spammer. It will create work for the list administrator, who's most likely doing it in their free time.

In short, while it might be tempting, you'll be annoying a lot more people than just the one who sent you junk mail in the first place, and potentially destroying the usefulness of someone else's forum. Don't do it.

And yes, I'd hope any ISP would take a very dim view of such behaviour.

Long-term commitment

Some readers have registered an interest in obtaining permanent IP addresses. This is in order to set up an FTP server to use with any ISP, and to play online games with other surfers, without having to find your IP every time.

A portable IP address is a very rare commodity — and they don't just come in ones and twos. The way the internet is organised means that routers have to know where to send information, and they have large tables that help them work out where data has to go, based on the IP address.

To keep that as simple as possible,

addresses are organised into networks which are divided into sub-nets. They can also be grouped into super-nets, so that a router knows

that all the addresses in one super-net can be treated together, which means it just needs one entry in the routing table to handle more than one network.

The net has grown to the extent that routers need a lot of memory and processing power to keep their tables up to date. Imagine what would happen if you could have a single IP address that could work with any ISP: instead of being able to route based on looking at a part of your address, routers would need to keep

Spamming the spammers will only create work for the list administrator



IDENTITY CRISIS: THE GREAT SPAM MYSTERY

Continuing the Cspam theme [p199], reader Philip Burgess writes in with an interesting problem:

'Yesterday I got six emails complaining to me about spam, asking me to remove them from my mail list. Funny thing is, to the best of my knowledge, I don't run a mail list or spam.'

'Then today I received 12 emails on the same subject: obviously someone has used my email address as the reply-to address, or something similar. How could I find who did this to me? Also, someone threatened to have me arrested.'

'I've heard about laws against spam: can I be prosecuted for what someone else has done?'

It's very easy to steal someone's identity and send spam — but also check that you haven't picked up one of the new macro viruses that

plunders your Outlook address book.

The only reliable way to try and start tracking down who sent the messages is to get hold of an original, complete with all the headers. From those, you can usually find out a fair bit of information which, while it may not pinpoint the person responsible, will certainly help their ISP to do so.

The best solution is to take all the headers from one of the junk messages and enter them into the form at www.spamcop.net to generate a report.

As for prosecution, unless your message was

unwittingly sent to people in a couple of US states that have anti-spam laws, there's little that anyone could do — especially if you can show via SpamCop that you didn't even send the message.

Engage in polite conversation with someone

▲ SPAMCOP CAN HELP YOU TRACK DOWN WHO'S BEEN SENDING JUNK EMAIL USING YOUR ADDRESS

reporting the messages to you, and ask for a complete copy with all the Received headers, and the culprit will be revealed.



information on an individual address and check every packet against a much larger list. They would need more memory and more power. It's not going to happen, certainly not for a single address. And you'd be lucky even to be allocated a whole network of addresses that's independent of a particular ISP without a very good reason.

There are some ISPs, like Demon Internet (0845 272 2666), that do allocate a fixed IP address to their own customers. To make that system work, Demon had to develop systems of its own when it started, so that you could dial into any of its phone numbers — and that's without the complication of changing ISPs.

Other providers will give you a fixed address on request, or for an additional fee, but you won't be able to move it between them.

If you want an FTP server, the best solution is probably to rent FTP space

from a supplier like Direct Connection (0800 072 0000) that offers it as a separate service. Remember that even if you have a 56K modem, the fastest speed anyone will be able to download from a server on your PC is 33.6K.

➔ Connection rejection

When attempting to access the internet, have you experienced the 'could not establish connection' message from your computer, while being able to achieve problem-free connection from your laptop using the same modem?

If you're using the same modem on both machines, then your first port of call should be the modem control panel and the diagnostics on the desktop system. Check that the modem is responding, and that the handshake is set correctly to RTC/CTS.

Make sure the cable is properly wired, and that the serial-port speed is set to 115,200 bits/sec, too; sometimes if you

have the port speed set very low, then the modem will refuse to negotiate properly.

If you have two identical modems, then use HyperTerminal on each system with a 'direct to com' selection, to talk directly to the modem. You can use the AT&V command to see what the modem settings are at present, and make sure they're identical on the two modems.

You should also check that the TCP/IP settings are configured correctly on both systems.

●Don't forget that if you have questions, and there are too many for me to answer them all, you can discuss them with other readers on the PCW internet list, hosted at www.onelist.com.

PCW CONTACTS

Nigel Whitfield welcomes your feedback on the Internet column. Contact him via the PCW editorial office or email internet@pcw.co.uk