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A No Soliciting Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) Service Extension

Status of this Memo

This document specifies an Internet standards track protocol for the Internet community, and requests discussion and suggestions for improvements. Please refer to the current edition of the "Internet Official Protocol Standards" (STD 1) for the standardization state and status of this protocol. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

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Abstract

This document proposes an extension to Soliciting Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) for an electronic mail equivalent to the real-world "No Soliciting" sign. In addition to the service extension, a new message header and extensions to the existing "received" message header are described.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Spam Pandemic

Unsolicited Bulk Email (UBE), otherwise known as spam, has become as one of the most pressing issues on the Internet. One oft-quoted study estimated that spam would cost businesses \$13 billion in 2003 [Ferris]. In April 2003, AOL reported that it had blocked 2.37 billion pieces of UBE in a single day [CNET]. And, in a sure sign that UBE has become of pressing concern, numerous politicians have begun to issue pronouncements and prescriptions for fighting this epidemic [Schumer][FTC].

A variety of mechanisms from the technical community have been proposed and/or implemented to fight UBE:

- o Whitelists are lists of known non-spammers. For example, Habeas, Inc. maintains a Habeas User List (HUL) of people who have agreed to not spam. By including a haiku in email headers and enforcing copyright on that ditty, they enforce their anti-spamming terms of service [Habeas].
- o Blacklists are lists of known spammers or ISPs that allow spam [ROKSO].
- o Spam filters run client-side or server-side to filter out spam based on whitelists, blacklists, and textual and header analysis [Assassin].
- o A large number of documents address the overall technical considerations for the control of UBE [crocker-spam-techconsider], operational considerations for SMTP agents [RFC2505], and various extensions to the protocols to support UBE identification and filtering [danisch-dns-rr-smtp][daboo-sieve-spamtest][crouzet-amtp].
- o Various proposals have been advanced for "do not spam" lists, akin to the Federal Trade Commission's "Do Not Call" list for telemarketers [FTC.TSR].

Terminology

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14, RFC 2119 [RFC2119].

1.2. No Soliciting in the Real World

Municipalities frequently require solicitors to register with the town government. And, in many cases, the municipalities prohibit soliciting in residences where the occupant has posted a sign. The town of West Newbury, Massachusetts, for example, requires:

"It shall be unlawful for any canvasser or solicitor to enter the premises of a resident or business who has displayed a 'No Trespassing' or 'No Soliciting' sign or poster. Further, it shall be unlawful for canvassers or solicitors to ignore a resident or business person's no solicitation directive or remain on private property after its owner has indicated that the canvasser or solicitor is not welcome" [Newbury].

Registration requirements for solicitors, particularly those soliciting for political or religious reasons, have been the subject of a long string of court cases. However, the courts have generally recognized that individuals may post "No Soliciting" signs and the government may enforce the citizen's desire. In a recent case where Jehovah's Witnesses challenged a registration requirement in the city of Stratton, Connecticut, saying they derived their authority from the Scriptures, not the city. However, the court noted:

"A section of the ordinance that petitioners do not challenge establishes a procedure by which a resident may prohibit solicitation even by holders of permits. If the resident files a 'No Solicitation Registration Form' with the mayor, and also posts a 'No Solicitation' sign on his property, no uninvited canvassers may enter his property... " [Watchtower].

Even government, which has a duty to promote free expression, may restrict the use of soliciting on government property. In one case, for example, a school district was allowed to give access to its internal electronic mail system to the union that was representing teachers, but was not required to do so to a rival union that was attempting to gain the right to represent the teachers. The court held that where property is not a traditional public forum "and the Government has not dedicated its property to First Amendment activity, such regulation is examined only for reasonableness" [Perry].

The courts have consistently held that the state has a compelling public safety reason for regulating solicitation. In *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, the Supreme Court held that "a State may protect its citizens from fraudulent solicitation by requiring a stranger in the community, before permitting him publicly to solicit funds for any purpose, to establish his identity and his authority to act for the

cause which he purports to represent" [Cantwell]. And, in *Martin v. City of Struthers*, the court noted that "burglars frequently pose as canvassers, either in order that they may have a pretense to discover whether a house is empty and hence ripe for burglary, or for the purpose of spying out the premises in order that they may return later" [Martin]. The public safety issue applies very much to email, where viruses can easily be delivered, in contrast to telephone solicitations where public safety is not nearly as much an issue.

This analysis is U.S.-centric, which is partly due to the background of the author. However, the concept of prohibiting unwanted solicitation does carry over to other countries:

- o In Hong Kong, offices frequently post "no soliciting" signs.
- o In the United Kingdom, where door-to-door peddlers are fairly common, "no soliciting" signs are also common.
- o In Australia, where door-to-door does not appear to be a pressing social problem, there was legislation passed which outlawed the practice of placing ads under wipers of parked cars.
- o In France, which has a long tradition of door-to-door solicitation, apartment buildings often use trespass laws to enforce "no solicitation" policies.
- o In the Netherlands, where door-to-door solicitation is not a pressing issue, there is a practice of depositing free publications in mailboxes. The postal equivalent of "no spam" signs are quite prevalent and serve notice that the publications are not desired.

1.3. No Soliciting and Electronic Mail

Many of the anti-spam proposals that have been advanced have great merit, however none of them give notice to an SMTP agent in the process of delivering mail that the receiver does not wish to receive solicitations. Such a virtual sign would serve two purposes:

- o It would allow the receiving system to "serve notice" that a certain class of electronic mail is not desired.
- o If a message is properly identified as belonging to a certain class and that class of messages is not desired, transfer of the message can be eliminated. Rather than filtering after delivery, elimination of the message transfer can save network bandwidth, disk space, and processing power.

This memo details a series of extensions to SMTP that have the following characteristics:

- o A service extension is described that allows a receiving Mail Transport Agent (MTA) to signal the sending MTA that no soliciting is in effect.
- o A header field for the sender of the message is defined that allows the sender to flag a message as conforming to a certain class.
- o Trace fields for intermediate MTAs are extended to allow the intermediate MTA to signal that a message is in a certain class.

Allowing the sender of a message to tag a message as being, for example, unsolicited commercial email with adult content, allows "good" spammers to conform to legal content labelling requirements by governmental authorities, license agreements with service providers, or conventions imposed by "whitelist" services. For senders of mail who choose not to abide by these conventions, the intermediate trace fields defined here allow the destination MTAs to perform appropriate dispositions on the received message.

This extension provides a simple mean for senders, MTAs, and receivers to assert keywords. This extension does not deal with any issues of authentication or consent.

2. The No-Soliciting SMTP Service Extension

Per [RFC2821], a "NO-SOLICITING" SMTP service extension is defined. The service extension is declared during the initial "EHLO" SMTP exchange. The extension has one optional parameter, consisting of zero or more solicitation class keywords. Using the notation as described in the Augmented BNF [RFC2234], the syntax is:

```
No-Soliciting-Service = "NO-SOLICITING"  
                        [ SP Solicitation-keywords ]
```

As will be further described below, the "Solicitation-keywords" construct is used to indicate which classes of messages are not desired. A keyword that is presented during the initial "EHLO" exchange applies to all messages exchanged in this session. As will also be further described below, additional keywords may be specified on a per-recipient basis as part of the response to a "RCPT TO" command.

2.1. The EHLO Exchange

Keywords presented during the initial exchange indicate that no soliciting in the named classes is in effect for all messages delivered to this system. It is equivalent to the sign on the door of an office building announcing a company-wide policy. For example:

```
R: <wait for connection on TCP port 25>
S: <open connection to server>
R: 220 trusted.example.com SMTP service ready
S: EHLO untrusted.example.com
R: 250-trusted.example.com says hello
R: 250-ENHANCEDSTATUSCODES
R: 250-NO-SOLICITING net.example:ADV
R: 250 SIZE 20480000
```

The "net.example:ADV" parameter to the "NO-SOLICITING" extension is an example of a solicitation class keyword, the syntax of which is described in the following section.

Historical Note:

A similar proposal was advanced in 1999 by John Levine and Paul Hoffman. This proposal used the SMTP greeting banner to specify that unsolicited bulk email is prohibited on a particular system through the use of the "NO UCE" keyword [Levine]. As the authors note, their proposal has the potential of overloading the semantics of the greeting banner, which may also be used for other purposes (see, e.g., [Malamud]).

2.2. Solicitation Class Keywords

The "NO-SOLICITING" service extension uses solicitation class keywords to signify classes of solicitations that are not accepted. Solicitation class keywords are separated by commas.

There is no default solicitation class keyword for the service. In other words, the following example is a "no-op":

```
R : 250-NO-SOLICITING
```

While the above example is a "no-op" it is useful for an MTA that wishes to pass along all messages, but would also like to pass along "SOLICIT=" parameters on a message-by-message basis. The above example invokes the use of the extension but does not signal any restrictions by class of message.

The initial set of solicitation class keywords all begin with a domain name with the labels reversed, followed by a colon. For example, the domain name "example.com" could be used to form the beginning of a solicitation class keyword of "com.example:". The solicitation class keyword is then followed by an arbitrary set of characters drawn from the following construct:

```
Solicitation-keywords = word
                        0*("," word)
                        ; length of this string is limited
                        ; to <= 1000 characters
word = ALPHA 0*(wordchar)
wordchar = ( "." / "-" / "_" / ":" / ALPHA / DIGIT )
```

A solicitation class keyword **MUST** be less than 1000 characters. Note however that a set of keywords used in the operations defined in this document must also be less than 1000 characters. Implementors are thus advised to keep their solicitation class keywords brief.

Any registrant of a domain name may define a solicitation class keyword. Discovery of solicitation class keywords is outside the scope of this document. However, those registrants defining keywords are advised to place a definition of their solicitation class keywords on a prominent URL under their control such that search engines and other discovery mechanisms can find them.

While this document defines solicitation class keywords as beginning with a reversed domain name followed by a colon (":"), future RFCs may define additional mechanisms that do not conflict with this naming scheme.

2.2.1. Note on Choice of Solicitation Class Keywords

This document does not specify which solicitation class keywords shall or shall not be used on a particular message. The requirement to use a particular keyword is a policy decision well outside the scope of this document. It is expected that relevant policy bodies (e.g., governments, ISPs, developers, or others) will specify appropriate keywords, the definition of the meaning of those keywords, and any other policy requirements, such as a requirement to use or not use this extension in particular circumstances.

During discussions of this proposal, there were several suggestions to do away with the solicitation class keywords altogether and replace the mechanism with a simple boolean (e.g., "NO-SOLICITING YES" or "ADV" or "UBE"). Under a boolean mechanism, this extension would have to adopt a single definition of what "YES" or other label

means. By using the solicitation class keywords approach, the mail infrastructure remains a neutral mechanism, allowing different definitions to co-exist.

2.3. The MAIL FROM Command

"SOLICIT" is defined as a parameter for the "MAIL FROM" command. The "SOLICIT" parameter is followed by an equal sign and a comma separated list of solicitation class keywords. The syntax for this parameter is:

```
Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter = "SOLICIT"  
                             "=" Solicitation-keywords  
                             ; Solicitation-keywords, when used in MAIL FROM command  
                             ; MUST be identical to those in the Solicitation: header.
```

Note that white space is not permitted in this production.

As an informational message, the "550" or "250" replies to the "RCPT TO" command may also contain the "SOLICIT" parameter. If a message is being rejected due to a solicitation class keyword match, implementations SHOULD echo which solicitation classes are in effect. See Section 2.4 for more on error reporting.

The receiving system may decide on a per-message basis the appropriate disposition of messages:

```
R: <wait for connection on TCP port 25>  
S: <open connection to server>  
R: 220 trusted.example.com SMTP service ready  
S: EHLO untrusted.example.com  
R: 250-trusted.example.com says hello  
R: 250-NO-SOLICITING net.example:ADV  
S: MAIL FROM:<save@example.com> SOLICIT=org.example:ADV:ADLT  
S: RCPT TO:<coupon_clipper@moonlink.example.com>  
R: 250 <coupon_clipper@moonlink.example.com>... Recipient ok  
S: RCPT TO:<grumpy_old_boy@example.net>  
R: 550 <grumpy_old_boy@example.net> SOLICIT=org.example:ADV:ADLT
```

In the previous example, the receiving MTA returned a "550" status code, indicating that one message was being rejected. The implementation also echoes back the currently set keywords for that user on the "550" status message. The solicitation class keyword which is echoed back is "org.example:ADV:ADLT" which illustrates how this per-recipient solicitation class keyword has supplemented the base "net.example:ADV" class declared in the "EHLO" exchange.

It is the responsibility of a receiving MTA to maintain a consistent policy. If the receiving MTA will reject a message because of solicitation class keywords, the MTA SHOULD declare those keywords either in the initial "EHLO" exchange or on a per-recipient basis. Likewise, a receiving MTA SHOULD NOT deliver a message where the "Solicitation:" matches a solicitation class keyword that was presented during the initial "EHLO" exchange or on a per-recipient basis.

Developers should also note that the source of the solicitation class keywords used in the "MAIL FROM" command MUST be the "Solicitation:" header described in Section 2.5 and MUST NOT be supplemented by additional solicitation class keywords derived from the "Received:" header trace fields which are described in Section 2.6.

2.4. Error Reporting and Enhanced Mail Status Codes

If a session between two MTAs is using both the "NO-SOLICITING" extension and the Enhanced Mail Status Codes as defined in [RFC3463] and a message is rejected based on the presence of a "SOLICIT" parameter, the correct error message to return will usually be "5.7.1", defined as "the sender is not authorized to send to the destination... (because) of per-host or per-recipient filtering."

Other codes, including temporary status codes, may be more appropriate in some circumstances and developers should look to [RFC3463] on this subject. An example of such a situation might be the use of quotas or size restrictions on messages by class. An implementation MAY impose limits such as message size restrictions based on solicitation classes, and when such limits are exceeded they SHOULD be reported using whatever status code is appropriate for that limit.

In all cases, an implementation SHOULD include a "Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter" on a "550" or other reply that rejects message delivery. The parameter SHOULD include the solicitation class keyword(s) that matched. In addition to the solicitation class keyword(s) that matched, an implementation MAY include additional solicitation class keywords that are in effect.

2.5. Solicitation Mail Header

Per [RFC2822], a new "Solicitation:" header field is defined which contains one or more solicitation class keywords.

Solicitation-header = "Solicitation:" 1*SP Solicitation-keywords

An example of this header follows:

```
To: Coupon Clipper <coupon_clipper@moonlink.example.com>
From: Spam King <save@burntmail.example.com>
Solicitation: net.example:ADV,org.example:ADV:ADLT
```

Several proposals, particularly legal ones, have suggested requiring the use of keywords in the "Subject:" header. While embedding information in the "Subject:" header may provide visual cues to end users, it does not provide a straightforward set of cues for computer programs such as mail transfer agents. As with embedding a "no solicitation" message in a greeting banner, this overloads the semantics of the "Subject:" header. Of course, there is no reason why both mechanisms can't be used, and in any case the "Solicitation:" header could be automatically inserted by the sender's Mail User Agent (MUA) based on the contents of the subject line.

2.6. Insertion of Solicitation Keywords in Trace Fields

The "Solicitation:" mail header is only available to the sending client. RFCs 2821 and 2822 are quite specific that intermediate MTAs shall not change message headers, with the sole exception of the "Received:" trace field. Since many current systems use an intermediate relay to detect unsolicited mail, an addition to the "Received:" header is described.

[RFC2821] documents the following productions for the "Received:" header in a mail message:

```
; From RFC 2821
With = "WITH" FWS Protocol CFWS
Protocol = "ESMTP" / "SMTP" / Attdl-Protocol
```

Additionally, [RFC2822] defines a comment field as follows:

```
; From RFC 2822
comment      = "(" *([FWS] ccontent) [FWS] ")"
ccontent     = ctext / quoted-pair / comment
```

The "Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter" defined in Section 2.3 above is a restricted form of ctext, yielding the following production:

```
With-Solicit = "WITH" FWS Protocol
              "(" [FWS] comment [FWS] ")"
comment      = "(" *([FWS] ccontent) [FWS] ")"
ccontent     = ctext / quoted-pair /
              comment / Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter
```

; The Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter
; is a restricted form of ctext

An example of a Received: header from a conforming MTA is as follows:

```
Received: by foo-mta.example.com with  
ESMTP (SOLICIT=net.example:ADV,org.example:ADV:ADLT) ;  
Sat, 9 Aug 2003 16:54:42 -0700 (PDT)
```

It should be noted that keywords presented in trace fields may not agree with those found in the "Solicitation:" header and trace fields may exist even if the header is not present. When determining which keywords are applicable to a particular exchange of messages, implementors **SHOULD** examine any keywords found in the "Solicitation:" header. Implementors **MAY** examine other keywords found in the trace fields.

2.7. Relay of Messages

The "NO-SOLICITING" service extension, if present, applies to all messages handled by the receiving Message Transfer Agent (MTA), including those messages intended to be relayed to another system.

Solicitation class keywords supplied by a client on a "SOLICIT" parameter on a "MAIL FROM" command **SHOULD** be obtained from the "Solicitation:" field in the message header. An SMTP client **SHOULD**, however, verify that the list of solicitation class keywords obtained from the "Solicitation:" field uses valid syntax before conveying its contents. An SMTP server **SHOULD** set this parameter after detecting the presence of the "Solicitation:" header field when receiving a message from a non-conforming MTA.

2.8. No Default Solicitation Class

Implementations of "NO-SOLICITING" service extension **SHOULD NOT** enable specific solicitation class keywords as a default in their software. There are some indications that some policy makers may view a default filtering in software as a prior restraint on commercial speech. In other words, because the person installing and using the software did not make an explicit choice to enable a certain type of filtering, some might argue that such filtering was not desired.

Likewise, it is recommended that a system administrator installing software **SHOULD NOT** enable additional per-recipient filtering by default for a user. Again, individual users should specifically request any additional solicitation class keywords.

The mechanism for an individual user to communicate their desire to enable certain types of filtering is outside the scope of this document.

3. Security Considerations

This extension does not provide authentication of senders or other measures intended to promote security measures during the message exchange process.

In particular, this document does not address the circumstances under which a sender of electronic mail should or should not use this extension and does not address the issues of whether consent to send mail has been granted.

This might lead to a scenario in which a sender of electronic mail begins to use this extension well before the majority of end users have begun to use it. In this scenario, the sender might wish to use the absence of the extension on the receiving MTA as an implication of consent to receive mail. Non-use of the "NO-SOLICITING" extension by a receiving MTA SHALL NOT indicate consent.

4. IANA Considerations

There are three IANA considerations presented in this document:

1. Addition of the "NO-SOLICITING" service extension to the Mail Parameters registry.
2. Documentation of the use of comments in trace fields.
3. Creation of a "Solicitation:" mail header.

4.1. The Mail Parameters Registry

The IANA Mail Parameters registry documents SMTP service extensions. The "NO-SOLICITATION" service extension has been added to this registry as follows.

Keywords	Description	Reference
-----	-----	-----
NO-SOLICITING	Notification of no soliciting.	RFC3865

The parameters subregistry would need to be modified as follows:

Service Ext	EHLO Keyword	Parameters	Reference
-----	-----	-----	-----
No Soliciting	NO-SOLICITING	Solicitation-keywords	RFC3865

The maximum length of Solicitation-keywords is 1000 characters. The "SOLICIT=" parameter is defined for use on the MAIL FROM command. The potential length of the MAIL FROM command is thus increased by 1007 characters.

4.2. Trace Fields

The Mail Parameters registry would need to be modified to note the use of the comment facility in trace fields to indicate Solicitation Class Keywords.

4.3. The Solicitation Mail Header

Per [RFC3864], the "Solicitation:" header field is added to the IANA Permanent Message Header Field Registry. The following is the registration template:

- o Header field name: Solicitation
- o Applicable protocol: mail
- o Status: standard
- o Author/Change controller: IETF
- o Specification document(s): RFC3865
- o Related information:

5. Author's Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Collected ABNF Descriptions (Normative)

```

Solicitation-keywords = word
    0*("," word)
    ; length of this string is limited
    ; to <= 1000 characters
word = ALPHA 0*(wordchar)
wordchar = ( "." / "-" / "_" / ":" / ALPHA / DIGIT )

; used in the initial EHLO exchange
No-Soliciting-Service = "NO-SOLICITING"
    [ SP Solicitation-keywords ]

; used on the Solicitation: message header
Solicitation-header = "Solicitation:" 1*SP Solicitation-keywords

; used on the MAIL FROM command and replies,
; and on Received: headers.
Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter =
    "SOLICIT" "=" Solicitation-keywords
    ; Solicitation-keywords, when used in
    ; the MAIL FROM command MUST be identical
    ; to those in the Solicitation: header.

; Used on Received: headers
With-Solicit = "WITH" FWS Protocol
    "(" [FWS] comment [FWS] ")"
; From RFC 2822
comment = "(" *([FWS] ccontent) [FWS] ")"
ccontent = ctext / quoted-pair /
    comment / Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter
    ; The Mail-From-Solicit-Parameter
    ; is a restricted form of ctext
; From RFC 2821
With = "WITH" FWS Protocol CFWS
Protocol = "ESMTP" / "SMTP" / Attdl-Protocol
Attdl-Protocol = Atom

```

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