# All About Spam

Do you know what spam is? It has multiple meanings in the twenty-first century, but it originally goes back to canned meat, the actual name coming from the shortening and concatenation of two words, spiced and ham, the product was introduced to the market in July 1937. Back in the heyday of meat processing, companies were looking for ways to maximize the utility of their animals beyond the normal cuts of meat, especially pork. Sausages have been around forever and were invented by country folk long before big food processing companies got in on the game, but we do have to give credit to the big food companies for hot dogs and Spam.

So how did spam become the standard nomenclature for unwanted commercial email? It goes back to a *Monty Python* sketch from the early nineteen-seventies. Remember those guys — *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *The Life of Brian*? They practically invented cutting-edge sketch comedy, no Monty Python and no *Saturday Night Live*, and no *Second City*. It all goes back to those mad Brits and their unbelievable sense of humor.

In the sketch, a couple of restaurant patrons are bombarded with the word *spam* as an option for various breakfast plates. The word is repeated ad nauseam. Finally, one of the sketch actors screams out, *I don’t like Spam*. That sketch got into the brain of some computer guys in the eighties, and they started calling unwanted computer messages *spam*. Like many things in the world of computers — bugs for example — the term just hung around, so much so that when email took off early software companies sold spam filtering products, and the word spam was given a new life in technology. The makers of the canned spicy ham *Spam* took a trademark case to court, ultimately giving up and allowing this half-life on their trademarked name to go into the world legally uncontested.

## Contemporary Spam

Spamming is like the computer version of posters glued to walls, telephone posts, and tacked to cork boards in laundromats and other public places, announcements for community theater productions appeals for sightings of lost cats and dogs, live music shows and things like this, except in the computer version it’s more intrusive. We have a sense of ownership over our inbox — it’s ours — and that makes it more offensive than the endless postings for events and lost pets in public places. To these guerilla marketers, who get your email in any number of ways, spamming is mass marketing, shotgun advertising, and they get paid for it. It’s evolved beyond just email. Now it’s text messages as well, WhatsApp mass messaging, social media, name it.

They operate on a percentage of-return model, knowing they’re despised by the majority of recipients, but these are not cultured leads, like people who call a brokerage looking for investment advice, they are bought or gathered contact lists, the purest form of cold calling. They’re usually to promote products, services, or websites, to reach as many people as possible in the hope that a small percentage of recipients will respond positively. Furthermore, they’re so prolific now that there’s little or no chance of negative branding, meaning negative brand impressions for the products and services that spam.

There is a coterie of typical spam used. The main one is email. They take the form of unsolicited and often deceptive emails for advertising purposes. The emails can be phishing for personal data as well, which is a greater risk and could compromise you. Social media spam automates the mass posting of repetitive and irrelevant content on social media platforms, often to increase website traffic or sell products/services. Comment spam posts irrelevant comments on websites, forums, or blogs which are indirect advertising.

## Stop Spam

The most pervasive and annoying is email spam, but there are ways to stop it.

### Email Filters

Build your email filters. Most email providers allow you to create custom filters. You can filter by email address, the sender to be specific, so if you don’t like a certain sender then you can set up a filter to automatically send everything from the sender to the spam folder of your email provider. You never see it in your inbox. This seems like the perfect poetic justice for the spammers because they never know their emails are not read.

### Secondary Emails

We all do a lot of shopping, registering for online groups, and signing up for newsletters online. Create a second email to do all these tasks, and any task you suspect is going to get the email on a mailing list, which, if you have not figured it out yet, is everything you sign up for online. Your email is gold, a commodity online to be traded, especially if the email has a context, for example, if this email is signed up for a diet email, then they know who you are and what you’re interested in, weight. A second email helps you manage your privacy and keeps your primary email clean, personal, and focused.

### Never Reply

Many spam messages will ask you to reply. There will be an implied question or a direct question in the spam email. You may have an impulse to reply. Do not indulge that impulse. You’re inviting more spam into your life.

This includes email responses asking to be removed from a spam list. Create a new email filter to make sure that this email is sent directly to your spam folder. Confirming your email with spammers is a mistake. It’s like feeding the bears at a rural dump. You’re just going to bring in more bears.

### Keep Email Private on Social Media

Whatever you do make sure that your email address cannot be accessed through any of your social media profiles. This includes all your favorites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, now X. Here’s the problem. People who collect emails can get a sense of what your disposition is as a consumer based on your behavior on social media platforms. This is not just an email for a general spam list. It’s a qualified email. Always protect your email on social media. Make sure you read the terms of the agreement with the social media platform provider to ensure that they are not selling your email and your data. This is one of how many people end up on spam lists.

### Use hCaptcha

This last suggestion is if you’re running a blog or a public platform that allows people to comment and infest with spam, you can use a tool like hCaptcha to ensure that everybody who is commenting is a human being. This avoids a lot of the spambots which are out there doing multiple postings to multiple social media sites. The hCaptcha technology allows for a certain number of pictures and sequences to be put up and a selection to be made which cannot be faked by a bot or any form of artificial intelligence. It has to be a human being deciding because there is a visual cue.