

Does Your Email Reputation System Have a Bad Rep?

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Does Your Email Reputation System Have a Bad Rep?

By CipherTrust

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The recent spike in the volume of spam traveling across the Internet, combined with the dangers of phishing and virus attacks that frequently accompany these messages, has forced enterprises to reconsider how they determine which messages will be allowed into their network. The latest advances in anti-spam technology have been enabled in part by the use of reputation services which determine the "good" and "bad" senders. There are several approaches to determining a sender's reputation; some more effective than others.

In order to determine whether senders are "good" or "bad", organizations must have the ability to accurately identify the sender of an email. Spammers and their ilk would prefer to hide their identities - especially for those that are engaged in open fraud such as phishing attacks. They modify email headers in an attempt to fool recipients into thinking the email is coming from a legitimate source. This practice, called "spoofing", is a common tactic used by spammers to obfuscate their true identities.

To confront this issue, Microsoft, CipherTrust and other industry leaders have worked to create standards that allow organizations to determine whether an email is coming from a legitimate sender. To date, there continues to be debate as to which technology will prevail. Microsoft's Caller ID (now dubbed the Sender ID Framework or SIDF) has emerged as a front-runner along with Meng Weng's Sender Policy Framework (SPF).

Unfortunately, merely knowing who is sending an email doesn't necessarily stop spam. As it turns out, spammers have been early adopters of the new standards, they are better about applying for sender authentication technologies than normal corporations, and they are eager to participate!

Regardless of how many spammers adopt "honest" emailing practices, the technology to identify email senders is quickly being adopted by major ISPs and corporations. Armed with that knowledge, reputation-based filtering can have a significant impact on the level of spam in everyone's inbox.

There are a number of methods companies use to determine whether a given email sender has a "good" reputation. Some of the most common tactics are:

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By far the most costly method in terms of human resources, In-house lists require IT staff to maintain whitelists and blacklists in order to cut down on the spam problem. The difficulty with these programs is that they require that the IT staff become knowledgeable about a host of email security and spam issues, and the investment is rarely sufficient to overcome the thousands of variations of nuisances and threats posed by spammers, phishers, and other dubious email senders. By the time the administrator becomes aware of a new spam attack, the spam has already gotten onto the network, and into users inboxes.

These whitelists and blacklists are built and maintained by third party organizations for the benefit of subscribers. These lists are subject to many of the same problems faced by in-house administrators. In addition, some blacklists are maintained by vigilante groups that are quick to penalize an organization

for spam; sometimes without due diligence and without giving that organization time to respond to spam charges. There is also a time-lag between when a spammer starts sending spam from a particular IP address and when the address gets added to the blacklist. By the time the services become aware of a spammers activities, the spammer has already sent millions of messages.

Two prominent examples of bonded programs are IronPort's Bonded Sender Program and and Habeas' Sender Warranted Email programs. These programs allow email marketers to secure bonds to certify that their email adheres to guidelines on the basis of privacy, mailing practices and issue resolution. ISPs and other mail servers can then query Bonded Sender when scanning incoming messages and handle them accordingly. However, this "pay-to-play" model is fundamentally flawed, as it gives spammers the ability to simply "buy" their way onto the list by securing a bond as a legitimate sender, regardless of whether they're actually legitimate or not. While the cost of the bond may be prohibitive to some senders, the benefits far outweigh the costs to most spammers, as the only way the bond will be debited is if Bonded Sender receives complaints about a specific account sending spam. And really, when was the last time you or anyone you know reported receiving spam? Would you even know where to report it? In reality, spammers are paying IronPort for the right to clog your inbox.

TrustedSource is CipherTrust's adaptive, real-time email reputation system that provides information on email sender behavior. Who sends spam? Who polices their outbound email well? TrustedSource knows. By constantly observing and analyzing email traffic across the Internet, CipherTrust identifies the "good guys." TrustedSource provides constant updates on sender status to improve spam-fighting accuracy and allows IronMail, the secure email gateway, to achieve the highest level of accuracy in determining good email from bad.

TrustedSource servers provide data to IronMail by contributing negative values to IronMail's Spam Profiler (SP) algorithm for messages sent from senders that are deemed reputable. Every message that passes through IronMail is checked against the TrustedSource list and based on the reply, IronMail will make a decision about whether to reduce the overall SP spam score for that message and improve its chances of not being classified as spam.

What constitutes "good behavior"

Spammer behavior changes constantly so no definitive answer is available. However, the following practices are considered "best practices" for email senders:

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Comply with the proper RFC protocols for email.

Do not attempt to obscure content or messages in emails.

Do not send email to unverified or nonexistent email addresses.

Post privacy policies where they can be read and understood, prior to submission of a request.

Offer opportunities for users to opt-out of programs.

Adopting a reputation-based anti-spam system alone has not proven effective to stop spam. However, by combining reputation-based systems such as CipherTrust's TrustedSource with other methods of spam control technologies such as SIDF, SPF, Bayesian Filters, Blacklists, Whitelists, Anomaly Detection, and Spam Signatures, IronMail has achieved industry-leading success.

CipherTrust is the leader in anti-spam and email security. Learn more by downloading our free whitepaper, "

" or by visiting

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The Rep

By Keith D Commiskey

As a young girl, while growing up in Junior High, if you show that you are too eager to be with boys, or even a certain boy, you will, sooner or later, be seen as "desperate". Come High School, reputation becomes more important (to girls) than looks. Imagine if you have a bad hair day, your next day you can still shine. But if you get a bad rep one day, your entire year can suffer. At least that's the case in High School (in Junior High your bad rep is forgotten the moment someone else becomes news).

Boys, by their very nature, are, and will always be, desperate creatures. This is a given. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the girl to make sure that this evolutionary process is maintained. That is, they cannot let show that they are "eager" to be with this boy, then that boy. And if a boy is able to come between to girl friends, they've turned the tables. This is not good for either girl. Only the most charming boys can pull this off, but it can be done. And these are the guys that you'll want to be with the most! Be very careful girls, because this can be the "life or death" of your reputation in High School (and yes, it begins in Junior High).

So, girls, in keeping with the tradition, and for the future of all girls, never let a guy see your eagerness to be with him. "Hard To Get" works like a charm, and is the single biggest advantage of girls over boys (and even women over men). Never let a guy come between you and your friends. Never, ever, let a guy feel as though they have the control over you; or, as sure as the sun came up this morning, they will take that control, and never give it back. Keep them guessing. Keep them eager to want you. Keep "them" desperate!

The way to accomplish this is by never letting a guy get the "Hard To Get" advantage over you. You

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must make him feel like you're self-sufficient and that you can live without him, while at the same time showing little signs here and there that you are interested. A boyfriend/girlfriend relationship will last much longer if you don't blurt out, "YES!" when he asks you to the next dance (and yes, he must ask "you") or asks if he can sit with you during lunch. Think about it for a second, and then calmly reply, "Sure. That sounds good." There are thousands of proven ways to make them want to be with you even more.

Remember, if you'd like to guarantee yourself a great reputation in High School, you have to show restraint in Junior High. Never let them see you sweat :) And never, ever let them see your desperation, no matter how desperate you really are! The girls that the (important) boys want most in High School are the girls that have restraint and dignity. Boys do not. These are the girls the geeks stay away from because they think, "She'd never like me." They're the girls the jocks say, I'll take her, and her, and her ... They're the girls that the intelligent, good looking boy knows, to get with her, he must also spend time with, and like to be with, her one or two not-so-good-looking friends.

The most important thing to remember, above all, is that a great looking guy won't necessarily take out the trash, show respect for you by opening the door for you, or get up in the middle of the night to feed the baby. So while you're gawking at that "Ashton Kutcher" look-alike, take a step back and see if he's also got some "Mekhi Phifer" in him. Great looks are second to reputation in High School. And while

immaturity will show your age, it'll end up leaving you with only the geeks to choose from. Being mature makes for an awesome and long-lasting reputation with the guy who will take the time to make it past the "Hard To Get" routine. It'll get you that guy of your dreams!

Keith D Commiskey is the husband to a great wife, and step-dad to one great daughter turning teen. Keith does graphics and web design by day; and is a father, husband and entrepreneur by night. He established himself as a web and database developer beginning in 1995, and has layered those talents on top of his graphics and computer animation experience which he began 1991. Hi is the sole creator and owner of two sites with creative thoughts that just won't stop:

and

The Rep

What's Your Ebay Reputation Really Worth?

Character or Reputation

Reputation

Collateral Damage: Are Brochures Derailing Your Sales?

Refund Plague Mini-Course

Email Spider Software

Cure Bad Breath

30-Day Low Carb Diet 'Ketosis Plan'

Email Commando

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