

# Why Spam is Good for You

**S**пам dominates our working lives, and despite what you and thousands of corporate IT managers think, it's for the best.

OK, sure, all those unwanted bulk emails are a nuisance. My own right pinky has been sore for a year, thanks to constant pressing of the DELETE key. As a nation of PC users, we get so much spam that the good folks in Washington even wrote a law to stop it. The passage of the Can-Spam Act sure got the attention of those spam kingpins: when they stopped laughing, they actually *increased* the volume of junk emails touting everything from hair restoration to wholesale ink cartridges.

That's right: In early 2003, spam accounted for about half of all email, according to Postini, a California-based provider of anti-spam services that scans about 400 million email messages a day. By December 2003 – when Can-Spam passed – that figure was up to 75%. And last year bulk ads accounted for 75 to 80% of all email, the firm said.

Likewise, the CTO of another anitspam services firm, MX Logic, said in January that Can-Spam “has had no meaningful impact on the unrelenting flow of spam.” In a press statement Scott Chasin said, “In fact ... we fully anticipate continued growth in 2005.”

Maybe that's because in the year since the law took effect, exactly one person has been convicted. Perhaps, next to murders and armed robberies, authorities have other, bigger problems on their mind than something that can be remedied, albeit temporarily, with a few keystrokes.

Believe it or not, though, inside all those pitches for cheap Prozac is a silver lining. Which brings me to Buetow's First Postulate: *For every problem, there's an equal and opposite opportunity.*

Imagine, for a moment, just how badly telecom companies would be suffering were it not for the Niagara-like flow of these lurid pitches into our inboxes each day (not to mention how much poorer certain Nigerians would be). Every few billion come-ons for Viagra or stock tips or Rolex watches mean that many more servers, which in turn means more business for all of us who design and build and service that equipment. Given that orders are not exactly overwhelming, most of us are willing to take what business we can get.

Some are comparing the epidemic of spam to the rash of trade shows popping up. This month, what I call trade show season begins anew and in full force, with electronicIndia and Apex bookending this month. Coming up in March are UP Media Group's PCB Design Conference West, IMAPS' packaging conference

and Productronica China. Then, in case you still needed a few more miles to ascend to the top frequent flier status for the year, there's Nepcon China and SMT/Hybrid/Packaging in Germany in April.

Perhaps all the events are a sign of an improved economy. Given that many companies posted hefty profits in 2004, I'd suspect it's a sign of corporate Scrooges who maintain painfully tight grips on travel budgets, meaning if attendees won't travel to the shows, the shows will have travel to the attendees.

Well, bring 'em on, this somewhat road-weary editor says, while reserving the right to skip a few here and there. To wit, while I'm sure the Sam Houston Race Park (home of this year's Houston SMTA Vendor Show) is very nice and all, I'm going to take a pass. Even so, the more the better. It's capitalism in action: After all, if no one comes, and there's no money to be made, producers will pull the plug.

I'd argue that having so many events is actually good for the users, because it saves them time and money in travel. Of course, it also means more email, as said show producers try to convince a saturated public that their event is the one worth attending. But, hey, in the end even that means more telecom and IT equipment – and more electronics assemblies. And isn't that worth the occasional bout of carpal tunnel?



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*P.S. Our industry appears to have emerged unscathed from the disastrous tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Our thoughts should now turn to those who weren't so fortunate. There are a number of organizations providing financial aid and other support; please consider contributing to one. Finally, I want to recognize Cisco, Henkel and those companies that have been so generous in the aftermath of the tragedy.*