

It's bacn! The latest e-mail annoyance

Newsletters, alerts, bill receipts are latest e-mails to bug you

By Jeff Smith, Rocky Mountain News
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First there was spam, stuff you definitely didn't want clogging your e-mail inbox.

The latest e-mail annoyance is bacn - newsletters, alerts, bill-payment receipts and other stuff you likely signed up for but don't have time to read. At least not right away.

Problems with those types of e-mails have been recognized as a problem for some time. But the term *bacn* without the *o* was coined at Podcamp Pittsburgh2 in August and spread like wildfire.

Jesse Hambley, a Pittsburgh-area Web designer, and Tommy Vallier, a new-media consultant from Ontario, ran a public-service announcement on YouTube.com and co-founded a Web site called bacn2.com.

"The difference with this new spam is that it's actually something you want but really don't have time to read and wish it wasn't mixed in with your work/personal e-mails," Hambley says on the Web site. "We are trying to expand its awareness and try to find solutions in trying to manage it and make you want to check your e-mail again."

Some say it's your own fault. After all, you're the one who probably decided at some point it was a good idea to get e-mail alerts for travel deals, hot sales, social networking notifications, mommy or daddy support groups, and who knows what else.

Others, though, have empathy for your plight and offer some suggestions for dealing with the clutter:

- Program your e-mail service, such as Outlook Express, to shift e-mails from certain addresses to separate folders. That way, you can review or sort through those e-mails at your leisure to see if there's anything important.

"They can receive bacn but consume the bacn when they please," said Tom Harpointner, chief executive of Atlanta-based AIS Media, which specializes in e-mail marketing software and services.

Harpointner said that's preferable to trying to block bacn with spam filters and risk missing possibly important e-mails. "Unfortunately, valid e-mails can get caught in filters. The single most important e-mail might be caught in between four, five pieces of bacn."

- Create a second e-mail account just for bacn, and check it whenever you want.
- Unsubscribe to as many e-mail notifications as you can to reduce the clutter. Remember when you subscribed to the alerts or notifications in the first place? Maybe you checked categories that aren't important to you anymore, proved to be useless or are more than you bargained for.

Harpointner said companies sending e-mails should realize they're not the only ones sending e-mail. They also should provide very clear unsubscribe options.

For example, while it's important for a business to confirm an order, shipment or payment, it's a mistake to break up that information in several e-mails, he said. Stores that send e-mail newsletters or sales alerts should measure the tolerance of their audience.

"Make it clear to subscribers how frequently they will receive e-mail," Harpointner said. "E-mails can work for you, but they also can work against you. While a big annual sale can generate a lot of traffic, if that big annual sale is every second day, it loses its effectiveness. It's more like crying wolf."

Could the U.S. be headed toward regulation or legislation limiting bacn, as it has tried to do with spam? It's possible because the Federal Trade Commission is looking at e-mail marketing. But Harpointner believes the industry would be better off self-regulating.

"Only marketers and some common sense is really going to make a difference," he said.

What's in a name?

What exactly is Bacn? E-mail alerts and notifications that you may have agreed to receive but don't necessarily want to read now. And they're clogging your inbox.

Bacn, without an o, gained momentum at an Internet event called Podcamp Pittsburgh2 in August, a takeoff to the tagging conventions of Web 2.0, the second generation of Internet communities.

Other examples: flickr, the photo-sharing site; and technorati, an Internet blog aggregator.

Bacn obviously is tastier than spam - e-mails that aren't wanted at all.

But some bloggers think Bacn may be too tasty-sounding, suggesting such alternatives as bologna. Others advocate regional foods like scrapple - a cornmeal and flour mush with pork.

After spam and bacn? Many bloggers suggest sausage.

Bacn-related Web sites

For Bacn-related materials, go to Rocky MountainNews.com. There, you can find links to:

- A "public-service announcement" about Bacn.
- The 1990s Purina Beggins Strips commercial.
- A Monty Python skit on Spam.
- A blog by Justine Ezarik.
- A Web site devoted to bacn can be found at **bacn2.com**.

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