

Blocked e-mails can be frustrating

Did you get my e-mail? I hear that question all the time from clients, friends and family members.

Sometimes I did read it but just did not reply or acknowledge it. Other times I had not checked my Microsoft Outlook by that time of the day.



John Deans

With so many people getting copies of their e-mail sent to their Blackberries and iPhones, they now expect immediate response.

Over the past few weeks I have been getting calls from clients about e-mails that either got blocked or just never made it to their recipients. Some of these incidents were becoming a major problem since it was affecting business deals and communications with lawyers — yikes!

E-mail is a great communications medium but it cannot be relied on for serious and time-critical exchanges. Back in November we discussed the impacts of negative e-mails and why it is never a good idea to start an e-mail war. Today we need to talk about the growing problem of e-mail delivery blocking.

Thank goodness the same federal government that forced us to all use toilets that must only use 1.6 gallons to flush, passed

another spectacular law that banned SPAM e-mail thereby eliminating the problem ever since. Oh wait, the rate of SPAM actually has gotten worse since then just like the new worthless government-approved toilets.

With nearly nine out of every 10 e-mails now flying through the Internet being SPAM the problem is still a major pain in the tail. That is why I do not have copies of all my primary e-mails of John@DeansConsulting.com going to my iPhone since I would be getting several hundred SPAM messages per pay which would be setting off my e-mail app alert very few minutes.

There are numerous fronts to the SPAM war with battles raging on the e-mail servers, ISPs (Internet Service Providers), client-owned firewalls and gateways, at the desktop with SPAM software filters, and then finally as a last resort with the redirects performed by user-configured rules within the e-mail application.

Any one of these choke points can block an e-mail message. So when I get a blocked/missing e-mail call I have to check all the above possibilities and perform numerous tests to see what and where we are fighting the block.

My first task is to verify the client is using the correct e-mail address. I have been looking for years for an online tool that automatically verifies an e-mail address but other than validating that the domain name is correct I have yet to find one that validates the complete e-mail address.

One quick way is to reply to a person's e-mail they have already sent you in your Inbox. Otherwise have them send one and reply to that one. This way there is no chance of a typo in the e-mail address.

Once I know we are using the correct e-mail address of the person that is not getting our e-mail message, then I look for any automated bounce-back message notifying us the message to that person is officially blocked. Lately I have been getting many of those from AT&T hosted e-mail addresses like name@sbcglobal.net or name@att.net.

AT&T has been on a tear over the past few weeks blocking IP (Internet Protocol) addresses of any Web/e-mail server slightly suspected of forwarding SPAM.

Unfortunately any single

blocked server can affect hundreds of domains and thousands of valid e-mail senders. They have blocked a few of my outsourced web/e-mail servers which blocks e-mail sent to those AT&T e-mail domains.

Recently they have been more descriptive in the blocking message and have been including a URL of att.net/blocks as a remedy for non-SPAMers like me to be able to remove my server's IP address from the black list.

Over the past few weeks I have had to do this several times and after 48 hours, e-mails to the sbcglobal.net and att.net start going through.

Client-owned e-mail screening appliances like Barracuda have also adopted some harsh SPAM blocking rules which have also stopped some valid e-mails from reaching their targeted e-mail inboxes. Barracuda also has a registration procedure available from the web that can validate your e-mail to go through their tight filters.

Sometimes though you may have to make numerous phone calls to find the right IT guy who runs the SPAM filtering apparatus

of the target company. Once you find this yahoo he will have to either remove your domain name, e-mail address, or server IP address from their black list (explicit block) or add you to their white list (explicit allow).

If the person you are having trouble getting e-mail to has a Hotmail, Yahoo, or Gmail account then odds are your e-mail is getting redirected to their SPAM folder.

This can be remedied by you calling them and performing a troubleshooting session. Get them on the phone and in front of their webmail tool like Yahoo Mail and send them a test e-mail. Give it three to five minutes and then have them recheck their Inbox.

After verifying they have the e-mail sorted with latest arriving e-mail showing up at either the very top or bottom and the e-mail did not appear, have them immediately check their SPAM folder.

You to have them look for the recently sent e-mail rather than the original since it could be buried under hundreds of SPAM junk messages.

Hopefully it will be there and then they can tag it as "not SPAM" so your e-mail messages will be allowed into the Inbox automatically from that point on since you will be in white list.

Other SPAM filtering software like CA AntiSpam works pretty much the same way by the owner noting valid messages mistakenly tagged as SPAM back to valid e-mail addresses.

Bottom line: Blocked e-mails can be frustrating and time consuming to resolve but it can be done with some investigative footwork and a little tracking smarts.

One quick note: For those still using AVG 7.5 Antivirus, please upgrade immediately to AVG 8.0 to avoid getting some bad root-kit viruses I have been battling recently.

Next week's column: YouTube channels.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.