

Dealing With Junk Mail

By

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I am often asked how to reduce the amount of junk or spam email received. It is a modern reality that almost as soon as you get an email address you start getting unwanted messages. Unfortunately, there is no single solution that works for everyone. There are ways to manage and likely reduce the amount junk email you get though. The information below gives options to manage your email as well as info about why you may get junk mail. You can follow every suggestion, though you may decide to pick and choose the methods you feel will best reduce the amount of junk email you receive.

Unwanted Versus Junk/Spam

While it may not always seem like it, there is a difference between unwanted email and true junk or spam. Unwanted email encompasses things like newsletters, airline ads, supermarket ads or department store ads. Unwanted email is typically legitimate communications and are often the result of previously doing business with an organization. Actual junk or spam emails are things like male enhancement ads, get rich schemes or phishing messages looking to get your personal info. Legitimate, but unwanted, email should include a way to easily get off their mailing list as this is required by law under the [Can-Spam act](#). Most often legitimate messages will have an *unsubscribe* link near the bottom of the message but there can be other methods. Diligently unsubscribing from unwanted legitimate email can make a big difference in the amount of unwanted mail you receive.

Grey List

On campus we have a filter known as the grey list which pre-filters your incoming mail. This list uses a feature found in all email servers to validate if a message from a previously unknown sender is likely legitimate. The best thing is that there is no need to check for false positives as the only mail filtered is guaranteed junk/spam. For many, joining the grey list gets rid of 60%-90% of true junk mail but won't do anything about unwanted legitimate email. A nice side benefit is that none of the filtered junk mail makes it to your InBox which can help when managing your [storage quota](#). To start using the grey list, send a message to greylisting@montana.edu asking to be added.

Potential Spam

You have likely seen messages that note **Potential Spam** on the subject line. Many folks will create a rule in Outlook to move messages with **Potential Spam** in the subject line to the *Junk Mail* or *Deleted Items* folder. If you create such a rule make sure to use the entire **Potential Spam** text – including the asterisks – to reduce the chance of moving something legitimate. This notation is added to messages by a central MSU system that you can help make even better. Anytime you get a message that is truly junk or spam – not a legitimate unwanted message – forward it to spam@montana.edu. Messages sent to this address are used to help train the filter and make it more accurate. The more junk mail and spam that is sent to this address, the more exacting the filtering gets.

Sharing Your Email address

The reality is that the more you share your email address, the greater the chance it will end up on a junk mail list. It is not very likely that you will have an issue when emailing individuals, but it is much more likely if you use your email address for mailing lists, newsletters, reservations and other automated systems. I use a *disposable* email address from [Gmail](#) for most mail that is not person-to-person which substantially helps with this issue. While you could use any free email service, I find that [Gmail](#) does a great job of filtering junk email and you can add the [Gmail](#) account to most smartphones/tablets as well as to your Outlook setup at MSU. You can also stop using the [Gmail](#) account and make a new one if the junk mail ever gets out of hand. By doing this I only give out my MSU address to actual people which reduces the chances of it being overwhelmed by junk mail or spam.

Using Your Email Address On A Web Page

Many departments or projects have web pages that include names and email addresses of those affiliated. This is handy for anyone that legitimately needs the info, but it is also a gold mine for spammers. Many spammers use tools that automatically harvest email addresses from web pages. There is research that suggests up to 97% of spam comes as a result of email addresses harvested this way. You do not need to remove all email addresses from web pages to reduce the chance of your information being harvested though. There is a process known as email obfuscation which lets you replace the MAILTO tag in the webpage with a small bit of code. While the email address looks normal for those visiting the webpage it is more difficult to harvest by automated tools. You can find webpages that will easily generate this code for you by performing a web search for “email obfuscator.”

Junk Mail Filters

I personally find that most Junk Mail filters are not overly effective, including the one built into Outlook. Due to this I typically disable the Outlook junk mail filter when I prepare computers. I find that most of the time these filters have false positives – real mail marked as junk – which can be as much of a hassle to deal with as junk mail in your InBox. I recommend skipping filters and use the other methods noted in this document.

Mail Coming From Someone You Know, But Is Not Legitimate

You may see a message from someone that you know but the message is not legitimate and if you check with the person they deny having sent it. This usually happens for one of two reasons: 1) The person is infected by malware that is using their email address book to send junk mail or 2) Someone has discovered their email address and is sending junk mail that is spoofing or pretending to be from them. If the person is infected they can potentially use tools like [Malwarebytes](#) to clean up their computer and potentially stop more messages from being sent. In both cases your address may have already been harvested which can lead to a burst of junk or spam mail coming your way. Unfortunately, there is usually little to do in these cases other than wait out the burst of junk or spam as it typically only lasts a few days to a week.

While it is nearly impossible to stop receiving all junk or spam email, the information in this article should help you manage and reduce the amount that comes into your InBox. Keep in mind that once you have gotten started getting junk email it can take a while for the flow to be reduced even using these methods. Diligently following a combination of all the suggestions in this article and a little patience will most likely turn a tidal wave of junk mail into a slow flow or even a trickle.