

## SPAM – Better Than No Email At All?

I'm a popular guy, if my email inbox is any indication.

A large number of women are vying for my attention, and for some reason their exotic names all seem to end with the letter "a." Lyudmila, Yulia, Ekaterina, Larisa, Svetlana, Lyuba, Galina, Nadezhda, Ksenia and other names seemingly created by a random letter generator. Every now and then I receive email from a mundanely named Anna or Veronica.

These women compete with an almost equally large number of emails supposedly from friends and acquaintances randomly plucked out of my Outlook contacts list, but having odd return addresses. My email protocol is simple – if I'm not 100% confident about the source, I won't open it. Occasionally I'll email the alleged source separately ("Did you send this to me?") but the answer is almost always no.

Not too long ago I received an email at work that looked legitimate and included just enough specific information for me to be curious enough to click on the attachment. My computer immediately stopped responding, and I frantically yanked the Ethernet cable out of the back of it before whatever was happening could spread to the shared corporate network drives.

I wasn't quite fast enough, the network drives had to be scanned and de-virused, and my operating system and all programs had to be reloaded. Two days' worth of pricey headaches and zero productivity in return for two seconds of stupidity.

Most bogus emails are simply spammy as opposed to malicious and destructive, but you can never be sure which is which. At least the worst that can happen with spam is that you'll be tempted to contact that Nigerian prince who needs your help to unfreeze his \$100 million frozen U.S. assets. Alternatively, you might end up with a lifetime supply of Viagra.

According to the website [securelist.com](http://securelist.com), spam emails currently account for just under 60% of email traffic worldwide, down from a high of over 70% in the spring of 2014. IP addresses in China currently (Q3 2017) account for the largest share -

about 12% - while about 11% is from Viet Nam and 10% comes from within the U.S.

Over 270 billion emails are sent daily worldwide, over 80% of which are pharmacy-related. Most spam is harmless junk, but over 2% of it contains a malicious attachment. With this kind of volume, you have to assume that even the most obvious scam is going to get a small percentage of idiots - like me on a bad day - to click on them.

Sadly, we live in a world where it's usually best to assume that everyone you don't know is trying to take advantage of you. I'm having difficulty reconciling this with my policy of assuming everyone I meet in person has the best of intentions, even if I don't understand them at first.

If I'm good at anything, it's giving people the benefit of the doubt. Suppose I'm walking down the street and someone whacks me on the back of the head with a two-by-four; my first thought might be that they must have been trying to save me from some unnoticed horrible insect perched on my shoulder, preparing to suck out my brains.

A couple of years ago I answered my land line phone and ended up talking to someone with an exotic accent who was trying to get me to give him my credit card number. My usual question for con artists ("Does your mother know what you're doing for a living?") elicited an unexpectedly candid response; "This is the only way I can afford to feed my family. "

That may or may not have been true, but I automatically gave him the benefit of the doubt. But not my credit card number.

*Writers Group member Dave Parsons actively avoids interfacing with the outside world, often at the business he co-owns on the Coralville Strip.*