
E-Mail Address Hiding:

Fight Spam at the Source

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ARE YOU SURPRISED TO FIND SPAM IN YOUR INBOX? WONDER WHERE THE HELL THE SPAMMER GOT YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS FROM? WELL, HE MIGHT HAVE FOUND IT ON YOUR WEBSITE.

Email spiders

Email spiders crawl the net hunting for email addresses in any source they can find. The addresses are then sold to firms that inform you about breast enhancement, lowest mortgage rates a.s.o. ... you know all about them.

Fighting it

The best way to fight spam is to never get spam. And the only way to achieve this is to never give your email address away. Hrm ok, that won't work :-). So how about just not using it on websites?

Using a form

A form (contact form for example) is certainly the safest bet. Although it has some drawbacks:

- Many users, including me, don't like such forms, and avoid them.
- It means a bit of additional work for the webmaster to create it.
- Can I as a user get a cc for my records?
- Can I as a user upload (attach) files? (Would mean more coding for the webmaster...)

Me, I recommend always providing both, a form and a link to the email address.

But if you show the email addresses plainly, you'll get spam. So how can we encode them?

Encoding

In the past the crawlers have not been able to find email addresses when they were encoded as html. But that has changed. It's still ok to use this method, but I would not put all my money on it. ⁽¹⁾

`$Bs_HtmlUtil->charToHtml('x@y.com')` will return

```
&#121;&#111;&#117;&#114;&#64;&#97;&#100;&#100;&#114;&#101;&#115;&#15;&#99;&#111;&#109;
```

Don't worry, your browser will display this normally.

Human readable only

Some sites these days show addresses like "your at address dot com". This may be ok for sites like Sourceforge where the visitors know how to read them. However: Some email spiders already understand how to find those addresses as well.

The writing `yourNO@addressSPAM.com` (and similar) may be ok to use in forums. But again, the writers of spider software may not be as unaware as some of the website visitors trying to send you mails...

Using javascript, my favorite

The difference between spiders and browsers is that spiders don't execute JavaScript (at least I have never heard of one doing it) while browsers (mostly) do.

So my suggestion is to use something along the lines of listing 1 on your page.

Listing 1

```

1  E-Mail address:
2  <script language="javascript">
3  <!--
4  document.write('<a href="mailto:your') ;
5  document.write('@') ;
6  document.write('address.com">your') ;
7  document.write('@') ;
8  document.write('address.com</a>') ;
9  //-->
10 </script>
11 <noscript>
12 <nobr>
13 &#121;&#111;&#117;&#114;<b>&nbsp;</b>&#97;&#116;<i>&nbsp;</i>&#97;&#100;&#1
00;&#114;&#101;&#115;&#115;<b>&nbsp;</b>&#100;&#111;&#116;<i>&nbsp;</i>&#99
;&#111;&#109;
14 </nobr>
15 </noscript>

```

Now if one has js enabled he'll see:

E-Mail address: your@address.com
and otherwise:

E-Mail address: your at address dot com

My guess is that not many email spiders will execute JavaScript (now and in the future). They wouldn't gain much, it would require them a lot more CPU, and their machines would probably crash on buggy JS. What about sending an email spider this code?

```

for (var i=0; i<1; i=0) {
  hungry += "eatSomeMemory";
}

```

Other ideas are using a page onLoad event, or even better an onMouseOver event attached to the document. And if you put the javascript function into a separate .js file, no spider will execute that one.

Additional notes

If you use guessable email addresses like info@, be prepared to get more spam. For webmaster@ it can even be half-targetted spam.

The class /core/net/email/Bs_EmailUtil.class.php⁽¹⁾ offers some functions to automate the tasks described above.

Instead of showing the address like "your at address dot com" you can create an image that reads the email address. The class Bs_TextType⁽²⁾ can generate such images on the fly for you.

Another (a bit modified) idea from phpapps.org⁽³⁾: Create an image that reads the email address. Use an onClick event that directs the user to an html page that has about this content:

```

<html><head></head><body>
<script language='javascript'>
window.location = "mailto:address"
+ "@" + "domain.com";
history.go(-1);
</script></body>
</html>

```

Note: the javascript on the onClick event may not have the url to the page above as one string because email spiders would follow it. You have to cut it into parts.

Example link code:

```
<a href="noJavaScript.html"
onClick="window.location.href='trickyEmailP
age' + '.html'; return false;"></a>
```

I have tried this on several browsers, namely Mozilla, IE6 and 5, Netscape 4.7 and 3.0 (!) as well as Opera 6 and it worked.

References

- 1 The class `/core/net/email/Bs_EmailUtil.class.php` offers many useful functions to automate the tasks described in this article. Get the BlueShoes PHP Framework from www.blueshoes.org.
- 2 The class `/core/gfx/text/Bs_TextType` creates "text"-images with different fonts and colors on the fly, for example titles. Get the BlueShoes PHP Framework from www.blueshoes.org.
- 3 www.phpapps.org is a french PHP portal/community site from Matthias Etienne.