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UK SPAMDEMIC: 111 MILLION SPAM ATTACKS MADE EVERY DAY

- **107 million spam emails received by UK homes each day or over 1,000 every second – up 30% from 82 million in 2007^[1]**
- **Spamdemic spreads to mobiles – 4 million unsolicited text messages received every day – up 300% from 1 million in 2007^[2]**
- **Just 8 out of 10 (79%) broadbanders have a spam filter, potentially leaving nearly 4 million (21%) completely exposed to email spam attacks^[3]**
- **1.6 million Brits (8%) deal with unsolicited emails incorrectly, giving spammers an ‘open ticket’^[4]**
- **UK ranks 4th in the world for spamming with 383 known issues – up from 184 issues in 2007 and almost double those in France, Germany and Italy^[5]**
- **uSwitch.com calls for stronger rules to govern spam and more pressure to be placed on ISPs and mobile networks to stop the spread.**

Britain’s ‘Spamdemic’ – the deluge of unsolicited ‘spam’ messages - is spreading, according to new research from independent price comparison and switching service uSwitch.com. In total British consumers are being bombarded with 111 million unsolicited and potentially harmful email and text messages on a daily basis or a staggering 3.4 billion every month – despite Bill Gates’ famous prediction that spam would be a thing of the past by 2006^[6].

According to the survey, internet users now receive a staggering 107 million spam emails every day – a 30% rise since 2007^[1]. But more worrying is the unprecedented surge in unsolicited text messages. Brits are being infected with four million unwanted texts a day – a 300% explosion in just four years^[2].

8 out of 10 households (83%) with internet access receive spam and over a quarter (26%) are hassled with at least 10 unwanted emails every day. 1 in 5 homes (18%) claim that they have experienced problems such as viruses with their computer after receiving a spam email. But,

according to the report, this could be down to the way in which unwanted emails are handled. While 83% of those receiving spam will delete any unrecognised emails straightaway without opening them, 7% actually open their emails before deleting them and an unknowing 1% have at some stage responded to them. Both these actions have potentially far-reaching consequences, confirming to the spammer that the email address is live and has inadequate or ineffective spam filters.

Despite most internet providers now offering spam filters as part of their package, four million web users are still failing to protect their home computer from a spam attack^[3]. This may help explain why the UK now ranks 4th in the league table for the world's worst Spam Haven countries^[5]. While European counterparts such as France, Germany and Italy have managed to contain the spread of spam, the number of known issues in the UK has more than doubled from 184 to 383 since 2007.

The 10 Worst Countries for Sending Spam^[5]

Rank	Country	Number of Current Known Spam Issues
1	United States	2334
2	China	905
3	Russian Federation	567
4	United Kingdom	383
5	Japan	265
6	Brazil	258
7	Canada	236
8	France	217
9	Italy	217
10	Germany	215

Correct as at 6th May 2011 – source: Spamhaus Blocklist database

But spam is not just plaguing home computers - it has become a growing problem for people on the move. 17 million mobile phones are being hit with unwanted texts every day and the total number of spam texts has risen a staggering 300% in just four years, from one million a day in 2007 to a worrying four million today^[2]. Spam texts can be particularly costly for their recipients because, unlike in email, some may be charged a fee for every text message received. What's more, some texts encourage consumers call an expensive premium rate number, often to claim a prize.

Spam texts are becoming increasingly dangerous with the rise of smartphones, which store a wealth of sensitive personal data such as photos, email addresses and even bank details. These are rich pickings for a spammer and, as a result, uSwitch predicts that the problem will worsen as smartphone take up increases.

Ernest Doku, technology expert at uSwitch.com, comments: “Spam is the great bug-bear of the internet age. Unfortunately, as we’ve become more dependent on our internet connections, so spam has spiralled to epidemic proportions. And the problem is no longer isolated to computer users - 17 million mobile users are now troubled by spam text messages too. The rise of smartphones, storing huge amounts of personal data, is presenting an enticing and exciting opportunity for spammers.

“80% of spam comes from ‘spam gangs’ operating outside of the EU and so are out of range of European law^[7]. Unfortunately, that means the onus is on the consumer to take action to protect themselves, but there are still too many computer users not using spam filters. People are running a risk. When you consider the potential loss of all the information on your computer, a filter is a simple step, but a vital measure.

“We urge the Government to introduce stronger rules to govern spam, and to put pressure on mobile networks and internet providers to work harder to stop the problem. Unfortunately, although consumers can take positive steps to filter out email spam, there is currently less technology available for mobiles. If spam texts follows the same pattern as email spam, this problem is set to plague us all for some time to come.”

uSwitch.com’s tips for stopping email spam

1. Whenever you see an ‘unsubscribe’ link in an unwanted email, **don’t click it.** By sending back a message you are confirming to the spammer that your email address is live, that you don’t have spam filters and that you open and read spam.
2. Most broadband companies provide spam filters as part of the product. When shopping around for broadband, try to find a package that includes these features. While they may not be 100% effective, they remove a lot of spam before it reaches your inbox.
3. Most email services such as Outlook, Hotmail, Yahoo Mail and Gmail allow you to block messages from certain senders. They also have a free facility that enables a filter to block certain keywords preventing spam from appearing in your inbox.

4. Spam and anti-virus software is available and a must – but it needs to be updated regularly to ensure you have the latest virus definitions. Some broadband providers have also introduced virus scanning of all emails so that any infected emails are automatically blocked.

And how to beat the mobile spammers:

1. Never reply to the spam message or call the number given in the text as you could be charged a high premium rate
2. If you wish to stop a particular message, you need to contact the company's customer services directly rather than through the text. Contact details can usually be found through a web search.
3. If you previously signed up to something and are receiving text messages from a short code number, the message may contain details on how you can unsubscribe, such as texting 'stop' to the service.
4. Be extra vigilant when downloading apps. Unofficial app stores may well house phishing applications which can glean personal data from your handset. Pay attention to the page prior to downloading an app which should explain the features it can tap into in order to operate.
5. Smartphone users should also protect passwords and regularly update the latest version of mobile software, to make sure your phone has the latest security measures. If it's a company phone, ask about anti-spyware security to protect emails.
6. If you are concerned about a particular spam text you can forward it to your network on 7726 for further investigation.

For more information visit www.uswitch.com or call 0800 093 0607

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Notes to Editors:

Total sample size in the YouGov survey was 7,759 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken 16th – 21st February 2011 with analysis conducted in March. The survey was carried out online. Comparisons to 2007 refer to same survey conducted September 2007. 'Consumers' refer to those with broadband decision making involvement.

1. On average consumers receive 5.6 unsolicited spam emails a day. According to Ofcom's Communications Market Report for Q4 2010 there are now 19.5 million residential broadband connections. Assuming this

figure applies to the entire broadband population, in total there are 107.25 million spam emails received each day by UK homes.

2. In total 83% of consumers receive spam emails. Assuming this figure applies to the entire mobile population of 48 million, this gives a base of 39.9 million mobile users receiving spam emails. On average this base receives 2.94 spam text messages every month which is 117 million a month in total, or 3.85 million spam texts a day. Making the same assumption, 43% of the above base receives spam texts which totals 17 million mobile users.
3. Broadbanders refer to those with broadband decision making access that receive spam emails. 12% said that they do not have any kind of spam filter on the computer and 9% don't know if they have any filter in place. This potentially leaves 21% exposed or 4.1 million.
4. This refers to those who have received spams via their personal email and don't have filters against spam or harmful emails. 7% of those receiving spam open the emails before deleting and 1% occasionally respond to them. This is 8% dealing incorrectly with the emails or 1.6 million.
5. Data from www.spamhaus.org.
6. Bill Gates speech at the World Economic Forum, January 2004
7. <http://www.spamhaus.org/statistics/spammers.lasso>.

About us:

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial, online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones and personal finance products including mortgages, credit cards, current accounts and insurance. In 2010 uSwitch.com celebrated ten years of saving customers money.

uSwitch.com is the first comparison website to achieve the Plain English Campaign's Internet Crystal Mark, which is recognised as a standard that a website has clear language, is accessible and easy to use, and has been tested on a sample of its users.

uSwitch.com is dedicated to helping consumers save money whether they have internet access or not. It offers a dedicated call centre, manned by uSwitch customer service representatives, as well as a freepost 'Send us your bill' service, whereby customers can post their latest energy bills with their telephone number to FREEPOST USWITCH, to get a free call back from a dedicated customer services representative. The service is also available via fax, email and post. Consumers should fax 0203 214 8417, email CustomerServices@uswitch.com or write to Customer Services, uSwitch.com, Centro 3, 19 Mandela Street, London, NW1 0DU with their postcode and usage details.

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