

Less email spam is not all good news

Junk email, commonly called spam, is on the decline. A report on internet security released recently by software security firm Symantec shows that e-mail spam rates have fallen for a second year in a row, dropping from 75% in 2011 to 69% of all e-mails last year.

Email "phishing" - efforts to trick people into giving fraudsters their internet banking logins and passwords - also declined from one in 299 e-mails in 2011 to one in 414 last year. The report also shows that one in 291 emails contained a virus last year, which is down from one in 239 in 2011.

"Given advancements in anti-spam technology, plus the migration of many users to social networks as a means of communication, spammers may be diversifying in order to stay in business," the report says.

Jayson O'Reilly, director of sales and innovation at enterprise-wide risk and security solutions firm DRS, says the key reason for the reduction in spam has been the move to "more of a targeted approach" on the part of the cyber criminals.

Spammers using new tactics

Kaspersky Lab senior spam analyst Tatyana Shcherbakova says spammers were using new tactics. "They (spammers) keep trying to draw users' attention to their messages: they use famous names, world events or fake notifications from popular online resources.

"Many emails contain links to malicious programmes, including exploits," she says.

According to Symantec's report, the estimated projection of global spam volumes decreased 29%, from 42 billion spam emails per day in 2011, to 30 billion last year.

The most targeted industries were marketing and media, manufacturing, agriculture, chemical and pharmaceutical.

According to Symantec, pharmaceutical spam makes up 21% of the total "but was overtaken by the adult/sex/dating category, which now makes up 55% of spam".

As email spam rates continue to decline, Symantec says the same techniques that have been used in email spam campaigns are increasingly being use on social networking channels.

Attacks increase

Social media and mobile devices came under increasing attack last year.

"Online criminals are following users onto these new platforms," Symantec says.

The Symantec report states that online criminals and spammers are becoming "less interested in email as an infection vector" than they were. This was because social media is becoming so popular and it gives them many new ways to steal people's identities or personal information and "infect their computers with malware".

According to Symantec, social media combines two behaviours that are useful for criminals: social proof and sharing. "Social proofing is the psychological mechanism that convinces people to do things because their friends are doing it. For example, if you get a message on your Facebook wall from a trusted friend, you're more likely to click on it."

According to Symantec, people share personal information such as their birthday, home address and other contact details on social media. This type of information is very useful for identity thieves.

"People are spending more time online, and the most popular activity is for social networking," Symantec says.

O'Reilly says only viruses were a worry previously, but the threats have expanded. Now there were rootkits, Trojans and worms to contend with.

Source: Business Day, via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>