

SPAM & Email Threats And Precautions

By Armando D'Accordo

Legislation has failed to curb spam and global 'cyber-crime' is on the rise. Email volume is at an all-time high, and much of it is worthless and/or dangerous. To protect yourself, you must become educated about the dangers and adopt good habits to reduce your risk. Then you can enlist help from both experts and products to further your protection.

SPAM

The daily tally for spam messages topped 164 billion spam messages per day worldwide in August of 2008. A staggering 97 percent of all emails are now spam, costing United States Internet service providers and corporations an estimated \$42 billion a year. In fact, only 1 in 28 e-mails sent over the Internet is legitimate. Fixing an infected PC entails backing up data, erasing the PC, re-installing the operating system and applications, and then restoring the data. All of this requires a qualified technician and several hours of labor.

Warning Signs

- Your computer seems to be working overtime – the fan is on, the disk is spinning away, but nothing is happening.
- It takes a very long time to open programs and perform simple tasks.
- Your bandwidth slows to a trickle and it seems to take forever to download pages that you know shouldn't take a long time to load.
- Your e-mail sent items folder contains messages you've never seen.

What can be done?

1. Acquire good anti-virus and anti-spyware protection. Be sure the solution you

choose updates and scans periodically and automatically.

2. If you do have security software that only runs periodic scans, make sure they actually run. Schedule system scans for nights, weekends or a time when you aren't on your computer.

3. Be careful about downloading attachments and clicking on links in email. An attachment with an .exe file extension should almost certainly be junked – that means it's an executable file, the most common form of virus out there.

4. Obtain a good SPAM filter. With free email accounts (Yahoo), you rely on the effectiveness of their junk mail folder. If you have a website generated e-mail system, you should consider an external SPAM filter, which stops spam from ever reaching your inbox.

5. Stop forwarding emails that ask to be forwarded. Hackers keep a record of active addresses only to send more SPAM.

Today's anti-spam tools are much improved, catching anywhere from 95 percent to 98 percent of spam before it enters corporate networks.

Summary

This article is intended to raise your awareness and highlight some potential dangers in today's computing environment. Please feel free to contact me or speak to your computer specialist if you would like additional clarity on these issues and threats.

Armando D'Accordo is an Area Developer for CMIT Solutions in NY, and is President of CMIT Solutions of South Nassau. You can contact her at armando@cmitsolutions.com or 516-208-4161.

Senator Stavisky Rallies Against Proposed Fare Hikes

By Senator Toby Ann Stavisky



In these tough economic times, Queens residents are struggling in so many ways, whether it's to save their home from foreclosure or economize after a layoff. Cutting service on buses in the borough, which is already criminally underserved by mass transit, is unconscionable.

Eliminating or reducing service on a dozen lines in Queens would create a hardship for many residents who would then need to make multiple transfers that increase the amount of time they must spend commuting, or would have to wait outside in inclement weather or at night.

The weekday service cuts to the Q74, in particular, are troubling because that line serves Flushing, Kew Gardens Hills and Kew Gardens, linking residents to shopping on Main Street, Queens College and Townsend Harris High School, medical offices, Queens Borough Hall, the courthouse and the E and F subway lines on Queens Boulevard. The proposed service reduction on the Q74, and the cuts on 11 other lines, will cut off residents of the communities they serve from not only the rest of Queens, but the rest of the MTA bus and subway service.

The proposed bus service cuts create health risks for our youngest and oldest residents, some of whom are too frail to withstand temperature extremes or cannot stand for long periods at a bus stop. It is also a safety hazard for people with limited mobility to have to board and exit multiple buses, a necessity that

would arise from these service cuts.

Then there is the matter of eliminating the station customer assistants, whose presence is a crime deterrent as well as an aid to riders who are trying to navigate parts of the system that may be unfamiliar to them. There can be no price tag put on safety.

Finally, the proposal to raise fares on express buses and Access-A-Ride would create an undue hardship for many in my district. These two services are of crucial importance to my constituents precisely because of the limited access to mass transit in my district.

The idea of doubling Access-A-Ride fares is a ridiculous and unfair fee increase on those least able to afford it, and in a time of economic crisis, we must be mindful to protect those who need it the most.

If we want to encourage people to leave their cars at home, increasing fares and reducing service is not the solution.

Senator Toby Ann Stavisky represents the 16th Senate district in Queens.

Learn About The Stimulus Package

By The Grassi Tax Team

President Barack Obama recently signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This \$787 billion package is wide-ranging, adding some new breaks to the tax code and extending other deductions and credits that have expired. It also marks the largest tax and spending program of its kind since President Roosevelt enacted the New Deal during the Great Depression.

The signing of the bill caps weeks of intense debate in both houses of Congress and with its enactment, the President hopes to save or create 3.5 million jobs. A little more than one third of the plan represents tax breaks and incentives for businesses and individuals, while approximately two thirds of the plan represents new spending initiatives focusing on healthcare, infrastructure, education and energy, among other areas.

Here is a quick rundown of several key highlights affecting both businesses and individuals:

1. Loss carryback lengthened - Businesses with losses can generally carry net operating losses (NOLs) back two taxable years. For 2008, businesses with gross receipts of less than \$15 million can carry back NOLs five years, which can potentially result in a tax refund.
2. Section 179 depreciation extended - For the 2008 tax year, businesses could deduct up to \$250,000 of

business equipment purchases as "Section 179" deductions. That enhanced deduction expired at the end of last year, and the Section 179 deduction dropped to \$133,000. The new law brings back the \$250,000 amount for 2009.

3. Bonus depreciation extended - The law also reinstates the incredibly popular 50 percent "bonus depreciation" for eligible business equipment purchases. This provision was set to expire at the end of 2008 and will allow companies to write-off 50 percent of the purchase price of equipment in 2009 - a major tax benefit.

4. New employer hiring incentive - The new law includes a tax credit equal to 40 percent of the first \$6,000 of wages paid to employees who are unemployed veterans or "disconnected youth." The latter is defined as individuals between the ages of 16 and 25 who have not been regularly employed or attending school in the past six months.

5. Sales tax deduction for vehicle purchases - For taxpayers within certain income limits, there is a new deduction for state, local and excise taxes paid when buying a new car, light truck or other vehicle through 2009.

6. The "American Opportunity" education tax credit - For 2009 and 2010, the bill would provide taxpayers within certain income limits with a credit of up to

\$2,500 of the cost of tuition and related expenses paid during the taxable year.

7. Homebuyer tax credit - Last year, a law was passed providing first-time homebuyers with a refundable tax credit that was equivalent to an interest-free loan equal to 10 percent of the cost of a home (up to \$7,500). Any amount received generally must be repaid to the government over a period of years. Under the new law, the repayment obligation is eliminated and the maximum amount of the credit increases to \$8,000. There are income limits to qualify.

8. The "Making Work Pay" tax credit - For 2009 and 2010, working individuals and families within certain income limits will receive a refundable tax credit of \$400 or \$800. For employees, this credit will be in the form of reduced withholding from their paychecks.

9. Help for unemployed individuals - The first \$2,400 of unemployment benefits will be exempt from federal income tax for 2009.

10. A one-year "AMT patch" - This was put into place for 2009 to prevent millions more individuals from paying the alternative minimum tax.

If you have questions about how the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 will affect you, please contact your Grassi tax advisor or visit www.grassicpas.com