

FTC and Senate hearings into the cost and encumbrance of email spam have raised awareness and begun to coalesce public support for a solution. While we applaud the intent of proposed measures, we believe that government is better suited to enforcement action against scam artists (in all venues) rather than the effective deterrence of spam. Ultimately, a legislative approach is folly. Even with international pressure to harmonize laws, Spam is routed through any jurisdiction and with disclaimers that are difficult to refute ("You are receiving this message because you or someone you know...").

A technological solution CAN be 100% effective - if based on simple economic incentive, and if implemented in a way that doesn't require any enforcement or back-end collections.

The beauty of email is its fast, free, universal, and simple nature. The reason the future looks so gloomy is that all of the current Spam-fighting approaches (including legislation) interfere with one or more of these attributes, making them inherently flawed. But there is hope in a completely new approach - Instead of punishing all senders with payment or registration, hold only unsolicited senders accountable - and only for messages of which their recipients disapprove.

Such a solution is being unveiled by a group of Massachusetts entrepreneurs who expect to throw their project open source after release by a group of US and Canadian ISPs. I invite you to check out [www.vanquish.com](http://www.vanquish.com)

This approach changes bulk emailers' behavior so they either don't send messages which most recipients don't want (example: ads for male enhancement directed at women), or so they carefully match mailings with the recipients' interests. Using this approach, irresponsible bulk emailers will pay or not play, and responsible bulk emailers will play and never pay - as long as the mail sits well with individual recipients. This will stop spam in a way that meets everyone's needs and will force rogue spammers to get real jobs.

In such a system, financial penalties are infrequent because the decision to send is throttled by the sender's confidence in his mailing list. It is not worth the displeasure of a large and untargeted audience, because their displeasure increases expenses beyond the minuscule return that spam can generate. Any money that is generated from penalties is retained by the service provider to compensate for carrying commercial messages distasteful to their own customers. Prior to such natural economic controls, the direct cost of spam has been measurable in the theft of their resources.

The model is essentially the same as opening your favorite trade magazine. You won't find ads for spark plugs in Vogue magazine nor ads for perfume and Italian shoes in Car & Driver. The commercial messages are highly tailored to their audience. Such respect for an audience is not the product of government legislation, it is a simple fact of economics. The cost of promotion is too high to blanket the spark plug ad across all media and all audiences. This capital barrier to entry does not exist for spammers, because internet access has a fixed monthly cost and no cost per message or per bit. But the technology exists for an electronic agent that asks unrecognized senders to leave their wallet at the door. "Visitors" retrieve their wallets on the way out if the recipient doesn't find the message irritating, harassing or irrelevant.