

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

How cyber-security punishes good behavior

Captcha! Are we done? Perhaps a bit more explanation is in order.

Google

I have several Google-run domains and related accounts. Their security is really quite impressive. That is to say, it has left a set of impressions on my body and mind. Sort of like a ball-peen hammer might. I use this as an example because they are trying to do the job well, even though they seem to keep hitting their users with punishments for what they themselves tell us to do.

The fight against automation

As one example, I have an account that I have used for many years and in the context of which I have communicated with about 5,000 different human individuals. I try to let those folks know – once a month – give or take – what I am up to that they might be interested in. Google provides two ready methods of sending mass emails to folks. One is using their “contacts” interface where you can check off up to 100 email addresses per hour and send them all the same email. The other is their “groups” interface which allows email groups (used to be usenet or some such thing) which allows you to enter up to 100 email addresses a day (up to 10 at a time) to add to your list. So let’s do some quick calculations.

How many button pushes does it take?

5,000 email addresses, sent 100 at a time, means 50 emailings over the period of a minimum of 2 days and 2 hours (sent 24 hours a day), or for those who perhaps work 40 hours a week – sent over a week and 2 days – if you never miss an hour. After all, you don’t get the time back if you wait too long for the next “send”. If you get clever, you can use their mechanism to mark sets of 100 addressees at a time and label them, one after another, then work your way through them as groups. This takes only about 50 button pushed per 100 addresses. Or for 5,000 addresses, that’s only 2500 button pushes. Do you feel your joints hurting yet? Are your carpel tunnels aching?

So they suggest you use Google groups to send out bulk emails. OK – good idea. So how do I add those 5,000 email addresses to a Google group? The obvious way is to have a button that says, in effect, add these email addresses from my existing contact list to my Google group. But that isn’t in the cards. No, you have to add them, in groups of no more than 10 at a time, and no more than 100 per day. And to get the properly formatted lists, you need to export from Contacts, then manipulate with a small bit of programming (which they do not provide) to get them in a format where they will add in “bulk”. So that’s 50 days to add 5,000 addresses to a group. But wait! To make certain you are not a robot, they force you to watch a timer go around and when they are ready, you have to click on a box to verify you are not a robot, then after doing that 6 or 7 times, you have to read street signs or detect cars in a picture to prove even further that you are human. So that’s about 5 extra button pushed per 10 email addresses, or about 2500 button pushes. My arthritis is acting up again...

Another way

Of course there is always another way. In this case, you can simply pay mail chimp a monthly fee and they will get a direct connection to your gmail account allowing them to “manage” your contacts. Which is to say, give control of your contacts to yet another group of information technology geeks who may screw it up any way they want, automatically, and without notice. Because, after all, we have transitive trust. I trust Google with the data they created for me, and they trust mail chimp who trusts their Chinese programmers who trust their Russian anti-virus provider who trusts their intelligence forces, who don't trust anyone but rely on criminal enterprises to do their bidding (and commit other crimes along the way).

Why pay more for the same thing?

So here's the thing. It's all done in the name of “security”. To counter “spam” (we'll ignore the lack of an agreed definition here), Google claims they enforce rules over email volume per account. But it's a lie. For another \$5/mo you can add another account. So I had 10 accounts with 500 email addresses each and sent out 5,000 emails in 5 hours. \$50/mo buys you that. For \$250/mo you can have 50 accounts and send all 5,000 emails in the same hour (it's still hard to get done and with plenty of extra button pushes). They claim its cyber security, but its really financial security for them. They also provide programmers a way to get around all of this, and it only takes a few weeks of effort to generate automation for the same process which you then have to pay them for in another way.

Bad behavior

The alternative to the “good behavior” approach to dealing with Google is to cheat. Hire a bunch of folks for ridiculously low wages from some 3rd world country to do your data entry. They are real human beings so they can pass the stupid tests for automation, but of course then your data and access to your accounts is granted to people under the thumb of oppressive governments or criminal enterprises. It's faster, more convenient, and costs less.

Conclusion

I am using Google and email as the example today. But they are not the worst offender by far, even if they are one of the largest offenders. And these examples are only a few of many I have encountered there. And of course I encounter many such things in many other providers. In fact, it is apparently endemic. It is the cyber security thing. Find ways to punish good behavior as a path to stopping bad behavior. Make it brutal and expensive to do the right thing so as to stop people from doing the wrong thing. Punish everyone to punish a few.

This is not about spam. It's about money and the appearance of security. It's about lazy thoughtless people who imagine they have a solution and apply it to hundreds of millions of others in the name of security. It's about the supposed creative geniuses of the information age being too dumb to see what they are doing and too volume oriented to pay attention to their users. And its about them not having to live with the rules they create for others.

Which brings me finally to airlines. I have long felt that airline executives and their families should be required to only travel using the lowest cost, lowest service, worst seating, etc. options of their own airline. Burger joint executives should be required to eat only the cheapest food sold at their own lowest cost stores. And all Google executives should have to only use Google services in the free (advertisement paid) mode for everything they do. Let's see how long it takes before they can send an email to all their employees to fix the problems.