

## Spam Scam

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I want to place on public record that I do not have erectile dysfunction and that "all night long" endurance has also never been an issue in that department either, even if I'm not sure I'd want to or, more specifically, have the opportunity! I also want to place on record that I neither want nor need to prove I have more prowess than the next guy and above all else that even if any of these things were relevant and/ or important to me I would not resort to using the product Viagra. I haven't met it, used it or know too much about it but every morning when I open my In Box I am bombarded with dozens of offers to purchase it at varying discounts from every supplier you can think of. It makes me mad!

E-mail SPAM, or junk mail, is the practice of sending unwanted e-mail messages, in large quantities to an indiscriminate set of recipients (one of them being me). According to Wikipedia it is now estimated that 80 to 85% of all the email in the world, is SPAM – and it feels like 75% of this is for Viagra. SPAM has been compared to a weed that persistently grows where we don't want it to grow, that which threatens to displace or choke out the plant life that we want to thrive. Those unwanted messages that we find in our in box steadily invade and obscure the communications we want to find, and get in the way of cultivating the contacts and relationships we want.

We tend to see these invasions as nothing but drivel but in fact there is a lot of psychology that goes into composing the junk e-mail subject which you are sent. The spammer wants you to open it up so the message is intended to leap out at you if only for a second before you delete it. When that happens the spammer has succeeded in tricking you to open that particular can of SPAM.

We live in a culture that is obsessed with keeping up and matching up., comparing and contrasting. We live in a constant state of anxiety about physical imperfections and upgrading personal possessions. Some messages offer hope and hype such as 'IT WORKED FOR ME IT CAN WORK FOR YOU' in the subject box.

Others are designed to trigger your anxiety and play on your basic insecurities, with dire warnings that your computer could become infected and all your data about to be deleted forever, that your equipment is too small, your performance inadequate. They scare you into opening them and buying the product.

Some fake a personal touch, calling you by your first name or faking acquaintance "How're you doing?". Yet more promise lottery wins or financial opportunities. It's all rather clever, albeit annoying and time wasting. Even if one ploy turns one potential consumer off – like me with Viagra – others are bound to work. One man's weeds are another's flowers so for everyone who is turned off someone may be turned on.

But as some SPAM is subtle and sophisticated, some brash and in your face, what can we learn about marketing communication from this? There is a need to be as careful in business with how we communicate, not only in content but in manner, the 'what' and the 'how' of our message to both existing and potential new clients. For example, when you have called someone several times and they don't answer you have to know how to bow out gracefully. If they are not calling you back they obviously don't want to talk to you. You can send an e-mail, then a letter and a few follow-up calls but if you still don't have a response, you need to accept you have it. "No answer is an answer" Continuing to pester the person only seeks to turn them off you and your company – doing longer term damage.

SPAM is a tacky, 'one size fits all' approach to selling, the old foot-in-the-door' trick – and that approach to communication does not go down well in real-time, real-world business today. Whilst I appreciate the need to get the sales call, often in an innovative way, no one feels good being hoodwinked into a meeting they don't want to be in. It's like when you visit a website and are told you have won the lottery (another thriving SPAM business) only to discover you are in a supposed pool of potential winners – you have been lied to. I tell you if I had even half a thebe for each time I received a pop up saying I was the 999999th visitor, I'd be lying sunbathing on my yacht, sipping champers in the Caribbean!

But maybe we need to take some lessons from what is working for SPAM and not just what turns people off. Is there more to be learnt from the Viagra and penis enlargement ads? They have been done to death but we still get them all the time and that says it must be working. Based on the KISS principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid) the Viagra ads haven't changed much in the past 5 years. Put a picture of a busty blond or a clearly well-endowed male in an email with some clever letter substitutions for penis, sex and male enhancement and blast away. Plain and simple. Somewhere in the cyber world are a few guys with an insecurity complex in the sex stakes, real or imagined and one swipe of a credit card later, another packet of those little blue pills is popped in the post. The ads hit the vulnerable spot.

Persistence is another lesson. The messages don't stop, using the same principle as a machine gun – it doesn't need to be accurate, just saturated spray in the right general direction and don't stop till you get a result. There's also something to be said for adaptability of the scammers because there are SPAM firewalls galore but the people who send out ads like this are so good at adapting that they keep getting through regardless how many filters I put up. If I was Joe Soap and developed a problem in that area Viagra would undoubtedly spring to mind because if nothing else comes up in the morning, the Viagra message sure as hell will.

So the SPAM approach-to-advertising lesson we can learn is this: adapt your approach to the potential client; offer them what they want, even if they don't know they want it yet; widen your net of possible clients: contact some of the people some of the time; it at first you don't succeed, try again later. You may just have exactly the pill they need to rejuvenate and invigorate their business but don't try too hard to force it down their throat because you just might end up in the recycle bin. [Tweet this article...](#)

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