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Pressbox

Pooling information to crack down on spam

Computer scientists suggest team work to combat ever-growing spam problem

Los Angeles (pte030/13.05.2005/13:38)

- Combatting spam needs to be a joint

effort, a pooling of anti-spam

programme information the way police

join forces to catch criminals, say computer scientists Vwani Roychowdhury of the University of California, Los Angeles <http://www.ee.ucla.edu/faculty/bios/roychowdhury.htm> , and Oscar Boykin of the University of Florida.

The scientists believe that additional software in standard email programmes could facilitate a 'behind-the-scenes collaboration'. The idea is to increase the accuracy of spam filters by the following process: When receiving a new message, anti-spam software checks it against the database of recognised spam. If no match is found, the programme would forward a query to other randomly selected email addresses in the contacts book. If other computers receiving the query have compatible software, the database check would be done until a match is found, or the message is found to be original.

Using this software a whole social network of email users could pool their spam filter knowledge.

Tests conducted in simulation with hundreds of thousands to millions of users have shown that the programme detected almost all the spam emails and seldom misclassified legitimate messages.

Computer scientist David Hales of the University of Bologna <http://www.cfpm.org/~david/> , Italy, said: "This is a really great idea. It turns the existing trusted social network into a kind of extended spam filter."

The system relies on this social network, and the recognition within the network of spam-listed emails. It is also based on trust - the system could be infiltrated, but from an inside user.

The scientists hope their software will be available on the market soon.

"The main strength of the idea is that essentially everyone on the planet would be collaboratively filtering spam," Boykin said.

(end)

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