

**West Virginia Executive Branch  
Privacy Tip of the Week**

**Fighting Spam**

**Question:**

Help! I'm tired of receiving e-mail from companies trying to sell things to me. I receive e-mail from restaurants, hotels, merchants, etc. Any suggestions on how can I get this stopped?

**Answer:**

Here are some steps you can take to reduce the amount of unsolicited commercial e-mail that you receive:

- ✓ **Don't give your e-mail address out to everyone who asks for it!** People often provide their e-mail address and other personally identifiable information (PII) without really considering the consequences. When you drop your business card into the fishbowl at a restaurant or trade show, you may win a free lunch or a gadget. You will certainly have your e-mail address added to the company's marketing list! Sometimes these lists are sold to or shared with other companies, and suddenly you are receiving e-mail from companies that you don't even know.
- ✓ **Read the privacy statement.** Before giving a company your e-mail address, ask for a privacy notice. Websites generally have a link to a privacy notice online, and this notice will tell you how to opt-out of receiving e-mails. This notice should also tell you if the company shares your information with other parties. If so, ask if you can opt-out of this sharing. If you can't, do business with another company!
- ✓ **Read the registration form.** When you register at a website, look for ways to set your e-mail and data sharing preferences. The choices may be confusing, however. By carefully reading the text you'll know whether you need to check the box to opt-out of e-mail and data sharing. You may need to un-check a box to get this result.
- ✓ **Check your privacy settings.** If you use social networking sites or a smart phone, make sure you understand how to use the privacy controls to protect your e-mail address. Understand that many applications – quizzes, games, *etc.* – exist simply to collect e-mail address and other personal information from users. Don't install an application without understanding the privacy practices of the developer.
- ✓ **Opt out.** If you are getting unwanted e-mails from a company, opt-out. Every commercial e-mail is required by law to include a clear and conspicuous opt-out mechanism. The company has 10 days to process your request. If the company doesn't honor your request, you can complain to the Federal Trade Commission.
- ✓ **Use a filter.** Your e-mail service should provide you with filters that move known or suspected spam to a junk e-mail folder. Check your settings to see if you can classify messages as spam or even block senders that you don't want to hear from.
- ✓ **Have a separate e-mail address.** You can sign up for a free e-mail account with hotmail, Gmail or a similar service and use that address for website registrations, contests and the like. This will help contain your spam in a separate account. If you have a particular problem, you can always close this account and open a new one.