

7 Hannah Crescent
Wilford Village
Nottingham NG11 7ER

Internet Complaints
NTL
Matrix Court
Siemens Way
Swansea SA7 9BB

15 December 2004

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Complaint #123511

Thank you for your letter of 8 December, and in particular for the rapid response. I appreciate that the problem of unsolicited bulk email is a serious one for service providers such as NTL and acknowledge that the response time from the NTL servers has improved recently, presumably as a direct result of you blocking servers used by spammers by means of the SORBS list.

However, I am not satisfied with your response to this complaint, because I do not believe that this is a satisfactory way to deal with spam. The problem with real-time black-hole lists (such as SORBS) is that they cause an unacceptable amount of collateral damage'. I refer you to an informative paper "The Spam Problem: Moving Beyond RBLs"
(<http://theory.whirlycott.com/~phil/antispam/rbl-bad/rbl-bad.htm>)

As a paying customer of NTL, I expect you to deliver the service that you are contracted to provide to me. You are failing to deliver certain emails, emails which I want to receive, and so you are not delivering on this contract. Your decision to block emails in order to reduce server load is really a cost-cutting measure. As an alternative, you should be investing in the infrastructure that you evidently need to deal with the volume of email and to empower customers to choose for themselves what email they wish to reject. If you are not willing to do this, might I suggest that you could cut costs further by refusing to deliver ~~all~~ email, since you are already indiscriminately blocking legitimate email? (I trust my sarcasm is obvious.)

You attempt to defend your use of SORBS to implement a blanket ban of the domains that they black-list with the argument that other ISPs do this, and SORBS do not mandate the manner in which their lists are to be used. That is true, but it misses the point entirely. It is only acceptable to implement a blanket ban with SORBS (or any other RBL) if it is also acceptable to block some legitimate emails. In my view, it is your customers who should be the judge of this, and I have already made it clear that it is not acceptable to this particular customer.

It is also not good enough simply to recommend that the administrator of the blocked host take action to get off the SORBS list. The official removal procedure published by SORBS on their web site belies the great difficulty experienced by many in their attempts to pay the \$50 'fine' and have their entries removed. A quick search on Google uncovers many such stories. It appears that the SORBS administrators have a reputation of unreliability, high-handedness, and arrogance.

I do hope that you can deal with this complaint in a more constructive manner. If you are unable to resolve it (by which I mean stop using SORBS, or at the very least, add my church's mail server, 212.67.202.168, plus any others I may require in the future to a white-list) then I will be taking this complaint to the next level and if necessary all the way to OFTEL. If it is the case that you cannot resolve this complaint, please would you send me full details of your complaints procedure and your Code of Practise. Thank you once again for your attention to this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Ian Goldby