

This is a message I received from a fellow webmaster that was having problems getting inbound email to AOL Users! Very Good Reading!

About three months ago I had an inquiry from a customer who had sent mail to a friend on AOL and they never seemed to get it. I had had no problems with AOL mail previous to this. I checked the SMTP logs and it always indicated a clean transaction with aol's mail servers. I provided the SMTP logs to the client and told her to get her friend on AOL to get in touch with AOL customer service and ask what happens to her mail. She did...they blamed it on all sorts of unidentified things...never solved the problem...never followed up.

About ten days ago another client indicated to me they didn't think their mail was getting through to two accounts. I then sent an alert to all MY clients asking them if they had correspondents on AOL and was the mail getting to them. I was a little concerned it might be a problem with me.

Much to my surprise it seemed that some was getting through and some was not. The SMTP logs on our side always indicated a clean transaction with a confirming sent. I was a little alarmed...what the hell was going on? Before taking the matter further I contacted Hector Santos to ask him if indeed the SMTP logs indicate "sent" that the mail was sent to the receiving SMTP server. He said yes.

I then decided to get in touch with AOL, thoroughly satisfied I was holding up my end of the bargain in the mail transaction. Well AOL's customer service is useless as we all know....One call to talk with a supervisor resulted in the statement "our system is operating normally"...implied something is wrong with you!

I looked up the administrative contact off the internic registration of AOL at www.networksolutions.com whois.

I called that number and got an answering machine ...and surprise the first two selections of the voice mail dealt with "are you having problems getting mail into AOL's system"

I left a message. I had a call back from a bright woman ***** about 2 hours later. She identified herself as one of 3 technical leads in email.

The first thing she did was to verify there was no open relay on my SMTP server as she said they won't deal with anyone who has open relays. I emailed her the logs of the "disappearing" mail as we spoke plus I tried to send a message to her on aol.com and aol.net. The latter she received. Mail addressed to her at aol.com did not get through. She said she would call me back.

Indeed she was true to her word and called back a couple of hours later. How long have you had that ip? 8 months I responded.

Well the upshot and confession from her was this. AOL unilaterally blocks WITHOUT ANY NOTICE whole ip address blocks that they may or may not have associated with spamming in the past. There is absolutely no way you would know this or be able to know if you are on those blocked ip blocks. Since we do not spam or allow our clients to spam I was very surprised that ONE ip address would be blocked without any notice just because I fell into a BLOCK that others might have used for spamming.

Moreover I expressed my amazement that the mail was not bounced but simply goes down a black hole with the sender outside AOL's system and the receiver (a customer of AOL) none the wiser that their mail was being killed.

She solved the issue very quickly for my system once she released the block.

HOWEVER, I indicated to her that what AOL was doing in effect was unilaterally denying service to their own customers. I had clients who had valid mail for AOL users and they weren't getting it. I indicated to her that it was incredible that AOL did not bounce the messages to a blocked ip address...she indicated they did not do this because the spammers were so smart that if they bounced the spammers would take another track immediately. In other words if the AOL customer had the misfortune to have a correspondent on a system such as mine that somehow got associated with a spamming block, then that AOL customer HAD NO IDEA that mail destined for him was "radically excised" as she put it, even though it was valid and good mail.

I have thought about this for 5 days. The implications are enormous. Ethical? Legal? AOL has implicit in its customer relationship a duty to deliver mail to and from that customer and to notify that customer if there is a possibility he might not get all his mail and that AOL does indeed destroy some mail unilaterally.

I don't think this is very ethical and I'm not even sure if it is LEGAL. I know I take my responsibility in handling my customers' mail in a very serious light and would never consider destroying mail without letting that customer know I was doing it. ...and in fact if I unilaterally destroyed mail from a sender to a recipient on my system with complete knowledge I was doing so, I'm pretty damn sure my customer could sue me to the ends of the earth.

Given AOL's size and apparent dominance we all face the possibility they may even attempt to close out small isps from their system. What was going on for me, is going on for others I'm sure. It may be a permanent block, an intermittent block (like me) or a random block but as they say a block is a block.

As I pointed out to Ms.***** how would AOL react if every piece of mail coming into my system from AOL , I decided to unilaterally "radically excise".

I am so angry and upset over this that I think I am going to take it to the Justice Department in Washington. I'm Canadian but my business extends into the US and I feel this challenges the entire internet. If people cannot know that their ip's are blocked in certain systems and there is no easy method of verifying you are blocked in a system then the entire email system is threatened.

We all know the problem with spam. We all recognize it. But most of us also know that the real problem with spam comes from systems that are poorly managed and attended. Smaller ISPs identify and kill spammers quickly (at least I do)...I do allow responsible mass mailings to verified addresses for businesses using my system but an individual who wants to send out 10 million get rich quick schemes gets no leeway from me. It is ironic that a good deal of the incoming spam I deal with originates out of mass mailings in AOL!

The real culprits in this are more senior people in AOL who have put in place these policies to block and NOT TO DISCLOSE and its those guys watching their stock instead of their customers that get me riled.

So there you have the AOL disappearing mail story in a nutshell...I would appreciate your anecdotal and factual feedback. I am not letting AOL off the hook on this and I have email exchanges with **** that are more than a smoking gun that I'm sure Justice would find very interesting. Profit has gotten ahead of ethical and responsible behavior here.

other references:

<http://postmaster.info.aol.com/>

<http://aolmailhell.com/>

[AOL Accused of Collateral Damage in Spam War](#)

[AOL Bans Mail From DSL-Hosted Servers](#)

[AOL Blockades Yahoo and MSN](#)

[AOL Blocks Comcast, Roadrunner Emails](#)

[AOL's Spam Filter Blocks ZNet Newsletters](#)

[AOL error underscores spam filter challenge](#) For those of you writing email to me, I apologize if I didn't personally answer each email. My business keeps me very busy and I am not able to devote much time to problems caused by AOL. I have found that closing any open relays in your mail servers seems to fix most AOL problems. I know what you are going to ask next, "How do I know if I have any open relay problems with my mail server?". For those of you who don't control your own server, you can ask your provider. The problem with that is that usually the provider will tell you there is no open relaying, but usually the person you are talking to doesn't really know. It's always best to ask, THEN CONFIRM.

If you control your own servers there will be a option in your control panel that asks you if relays are allowed. If they are allowed, there will be a list for adding or deleting hosts that can relay through your server. Spammers love to find these open relays. It provides a free ride for them while using your bandwidth. Your server can be blocked by more than AOL if it's spewing out spam.

SPAM! Oh how I hate it! It caused the problem with AOL. (Of course AOL has a very poor concept of how to handle SPAM.) Of all the SPAM solutions we tried here, I like Mail Washer Pro the best. It's easy to install, easy to learn, easy to use and inexpensive. You can use multiple email accounts with it. It stops SPAM at your server and allows you to decide how you want it handled BEFORE it's downloaded. That's right, you no longer have to download your email to your PC to filter it, delete it, or send it to your junk mail folder. It sure keeps a lot of virus' off your PC.

I cut my spam emails down tremendously. It has a interface with Spam Cop which I also use. In my humble opinion it's the only solution to use. They have a very detailed site. If you would like to get more information, just click on the banner below. I seldom endorse a product that I don't sell, but this one is exceptional.