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State lawmakers join fight against spam



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Two Florida legislators want to "slam spam," adding criminal penalties to those caught flooding inboxes with junk messages that are "false, misleading and unsolicited."

State Rep. Ari Abraham Porth, D-Coral Springs, already has filed his bill HB 45; (www.myfloridahouse.gov/) and State Sen. Dave Aronberg, D-West Palm Beach, is preparing a Senate version. Penalties, up to a felony, would be based on volume: 10,000 in a 24-hour period, 100,000 in 30 days, 1-million in a year.

In a news release, Port acknowledged the difficulty of tracking down spammers, but said "we must enact laws to protect our most vulnerable residents from unscrupulous con artists and thieves."

Gov. Jeb Bush gave qualified support to the idea. "I hate spam," the governor said. "I guess I don't know how you can legislate against it unless he's found a way to identify spammers that can be located in Mozambique or some other place and prosecute them. I'm all for it. It's a real nuisance and it's done to do harm in some cases, and there should be criminal charges. I just don't know how it's enforceable."

Congress passed the CAN-SPAM Act (Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing) in 2003, but it generally has been viewed as ineffective in the war on junk e-mail.

Survey: Businesses reluctant to report cyber attacks

Most businesses do not report cyber attacks to law enforcement authorities, fearing the disclosure would harm their image and benefit rivals, FBI Director Robert Mueller says.

This reluctance has become especially important at a time when identity theft is growing rapidly and terrorists are increasingly using the Internet, Mueller said in a speech to the InfraGard national conference, at which private companies share security tips and expertise with the FBI.

"Today a command sent over a network to a power station's control computer could be just as deadly as a backpack full of explosives," Mueller said.

Business leaders last month announced an education campaign to better protect sensitive client information from hackers and other thieves, after a string of high-profile data thefts and losses.

Mueller's comments were based on an annual survey conducted by the FBI and the private Computer Security Institute that found just 20 percent of businesses reported computer intrusions last year, a figure that has held steady for several years.

The reasons cited most often for keeping the incidents quiet were loss of business to competitors and

potential damage to a company's image among consumers.

Privacy groups wary of Internet phone wiretap laws

New regulations making it easier for law enforcement to tap Internet phone calls also will make computer systems more vulnerable to hackers, digital privacy and civil liberties groups say.

While the groups don't want the Internet to be a safe haven for terrorists and criminals, they complain that expanding wiretapping laws to cover Internet calls, or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), will create additional points of attack and security holes that hackers can exploit.

"Once you enable third-party access to Internet-based communication, you create a vulnerability that didn't previously exist," said Marc Rotenberg, executive director at the Electronic Privacy Information Center. "It will put at risk the stability and security of the Internet."

Acting on appeals from the Justice Department and other law enforcement officials, the Federal Communications Commission voted to require providers of Internet phone calls and broadband services to ensure their equipment can allow police wiretaps.

The decision applies to Voice over Internet Protocol providers such as Vonage that use a central telephone company to complete the Internet calls. It also applies to cable and phone companies that provide broadband services.

The companies will have 18 months to comply.

Microsoft says Apple's iPod will face more competition

Microsoft Corp., the world's biggest softwaremaker, said Apple Computer Inc.'s best-selling iPod music player will face increased competition from new products in the end-of-year shopping season.

Microsoft is working with electronicsmakers including Royal Philips Electronics NV, Samsung Electronics Co. and Creative Technology Ltd. to design and test music players that rival iPod, said Erik Huggers, head of Microsoft's Digital Media Division.

"Come this fall, there is going to be a number of devices that get close to competing with Apple's iPod," Huggers said. By the second quarter of next year, "there is going to be a whole lineup of products that can compete with Apple in industrial design, usability, functionality and features."

Microsoft and its partners beat Apple to market with digital music players that work with Microsoft audio software. They proved unattractive and difficult to use, leaving the field open for Apple, which has sold 21.8-million iPods since October 2001, grabbing 75 percent of the market share in the United States.

"It's going to take a lot to dethrone Apple," said Michael Gartenberg, an analyst at Jupiter Research in New York. "Apple won't sit on its laurels, and I expect we'll see another iteration of the iPod for the holidays. Unless Microsoft is really willing to spend the time and effort to get behind a player or a select group of players, it's not going to happen."

South Korean man dies after 49-hour game binge

A 28-year-old South Korean man died of exhaustion in an Internet cafe after playing computer games nonstop for 49 hours, police said.

The man, identified by police only by his last name, Lee, collapsed Friday after having eaten little, shunning sleep and refusing to leave his keyboard while he played the battle simulation game Starcraft.

Lee was quickly moved to a hospital but died after a few hours from what doctors presume was a heart attack.

Lee had been fired from his job last month because he kept missing work to play computer games, police said.

Computer games are enormously popular in South Korea, home to professional gamers who earn big money through sponsorships and to TV stations devoted to broadcasting matches.

"Spam king' to pay \$7-million settlement to Microsoft

Microsoft will receive \$7-million from an alleged "spam king" - the largest settlement yet in the company's legal struggle against the flood of unwanted e-mail.

The Redmond, Wash., company's top lawyer described the deal with online marketer Scott Richter as a key step in the fight against spam. Microsoft plans to use much of the money to fund more antispam efforts. Law enforcement agencies and antispam groups welcomed the news.

But a leader of one antispam group said he doubted that the settlement, by itself, would do anything to cause other spammers to change their ways.

Richter, who admits no wrongdoing, plans to remain in business. But he says he has altered his practices to exceed the requirements of antispam laws.

The settlement, which requires court approval, would end a 20-month-long dispute with Richter, an outspoken Colorado businessman whose appearances in the national media have made him something of a celebrity.

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- Compiled from reports by Times staff writer Joni James and Times wires.

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