

Tips on dealing with email.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

How do you protect yourself from bad things that arrive in your email? With all the stories you hear, how do you know what to open and what to just delete? Here is some straight forward thinking that is going to help you stay safe. Read through these scenarios and learn the key behaviors you need to make habits of, and others you need to let go of.

Remember: The most effective way to get onto someone's computer is simply to ask them for information. In other words, someone gets to you and asks for help: their story is compelling; their need is great; you are a good, compassionate, person so you help. This is heart of the problem.

BEWARE OF SAD TIDINGS

You look at your email and see a subject that says: "Need help finding missing child". You do not know who the mail is from yet you open the mail. How can you not be moved by a parent looking for their lost child? The mail is simple; it tells the story of a lost 6 year old girl and her desperate mother. All it asks is that you go to their website, and that you pass the mail on to your friends. You cry real tears and pass on the mail. You go to the website and read a heart wrenching story. All they ask is a donation to help in the search for this child. You give them a 5 dollar donation. After all it's only five dollars.

Did you use a credit card for the donation? Guess what? Now they have your credit card number and enough information to steal your good name. Did you send them a check? Now, they know your name, address, and checking account number. Your good name is now theirs.

STOP AND RESEARCH

Before you gave your help, did you check with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (<http://www.MissingKids.com>)? Did you put the subject of the mail into Google or Yahoo to see what comes up? You would have probably found out that it was a scam.

Think about it this way, whenever you get approached to be helpful, whether in email, on the phone, or in person, always confirm the truth of the story. Do not accept things on face value. Just because your best friend or aunt or cousin sends you this email about the dying children or the lost boys or the family whose house burned down does not mean it is true. They are just as likely to be misled as anyone else.

THESE ARE THE NEW BEHAVIORS YOU NEED TO ADOPT:

- **NEVER** open an attachment from a stranger even if it promises you eternal love or boundless riches. **DO NOT OPEN IT!!!!**
- **NEVER** send financial, bank account, credit card or any other sensitive information in email. **NEVER!!!!!!**

- **DELETE IT.** If you get a email that looks like it is from your phone company, internet provider, Amazon, eBay, or any other institution you know, and it asks to confirm your account information or password, or to update your credit card data: **DELETE IT!!!** Send that company an email, or better yet: call them on the phone and ask "Did you send me an email asking for my information?" They will invariably tell you: "We never send out emails like that."
Remember that sending email is like sending a letter in a transparent envelope. It is by its very nature completely insecure and anybody along the route can open it and read it and leave no trace of the intrusion. Think also about this: I can print up a letter saying just about anything I want, put it in a fancy envelope to mail to you: How do you know the truth of it?
- **RESEARCH.** If you get an email that tells a truly compelling story, and you absolutely feel moved by it, **research** it. Before you forward the mail, or answer it, go to web sites like the ones below, and search. Find out if the email you are reading is real or a hoax.
 - The F.B.I. Cyber Investigations Unit (<http://www.FBI.gov/CyberInvest/EScams.htm>)
 - Hoax-Slayer.com (<http://Hoax-Slayer.com>)
 - ScamDex (<http://www.ScamDex.com>)
 - TruthOrFiction (<http://www.TruthOrFiction.com>)
- **Your most powerful tool is to be skeptical, and informed.** You must act as if every email is a threat.
- Just because the button says "Click Here to Win!" does not mean you have to.
- **STOP! THINK!**
No one gives away something for nothing!
No one wins a lottery they never entered!
No legitimate business will solicit your personal information in email!
Your best friend can be as easily fooled as you. Just because they sent it does not make it safe!
No honest person will ask you for \$1000 so they can get a million out of their dead uncle's bank!
- **STOP! THINK!**