Mail Tools for a Hostile Planet

MANAGING THE MAIL

Don't look now, but your mailbox is full of junk, and a snooper is live on a distant server, reading your opinions of your boss. Remember when email used to be easy? To restore some sanity to your correspondence, you'll need the right tools. **BY JOE CASAD**

In the few short years since email spilled beyond the hacker culture, it has become nearly impossible to imagine life without it. The halls of academia, business, and government all operate on email. And the supreme simplicity of sending an email message has led to a proliferation of mail. Thirty years ago, you might have gotten five typewritten memos per day; today you could be getting 50 in email – that's 250 in a working week – and this is only the messages from people you know. If you add all the spam that is addressed to you from spam dens hidden everywhere on the Earth, you'll see why many email users are desperately wondering how such a promising technology could lead to such tedium.

The biggest questions questions facing today's email user are:

• How do you filter out the email you don't want?
• How do you organize the mail you do want?
• How do you secure your email messages?

These questions form the backdrop for this month's Email cover story. We'll provide you with detailed, practical information on managing your mail. You'll learn how to create a spam-free and secure email environment in Linux without spending a lot of money on software.

In our lead article on SpamAssassin (p22) we show you how to configure the popular Open Source spam filter SpamAssassin. You'll learn how to download and install SpamAssassin. The article provides detailed procedures describing how to set up spam filtering using the Kmail, Evolution, and Thunderbird email clients. You'll also learn about Thunderbird's built-in spam filtering feature that doesn't even require an outside spam application. Thunderbird lets you place junk mail messages in a special folder and then analyzes those messages to look for clues or patterns that the application will use for filtering future messages. Using this feature, you can *train* Thunderbird to identify spam.

Our second article, on Encrypting Email with Kmail, Thunderbird, and Evolution, describes the Open Source program GNU Privacy Guard (GnuPG) – an important tool for encrypting email messages. Once again we study the topic from the viewpoint of the three common mail clients, Kmail, Evolution, and Thunderbird. You'll learn how to configure each client to interact with GnuPG, and you'll find out the advantages and special features of each client's mail encryption system. GnuPG is not only used for encrypting messages; it is also a tool for signing messages to verify the identity of the sender. You'll learn how the clients handle signing, and you'll get some good advice on distributing and signing encryption keys.

In our third article, on Hypermail, we show you the handy Hypermail application, which converts your entire email message folder into an indexed collection of HTML documents. Each of the documents contains links to preceding and answering messages, and Hypermail generates indexes that sort the mail by subject, author, date, and thread.

Read on for this month's Email cover story. We hope these techniques help you in your quest to keep your mailbox secure and spam-free. ■