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Corporate Spim Is No LOL Matter

SPIM IS COMING OF age—and that's not a good thing. These annoying ads are the instant-messaging version of spam, and they chimed in a remarkable 1.2 billion times last year. The average IM user can expect to be interrupted with instant junk messages about five times a day, and those interruptions will grow to 27 times a day by 2008, according to the Radicati Group, a Palo Alto, Calif., research firm. The Feds aren't taking it lightly: earlier this year they made the criminal arrest of an alleged spimmer. They charged an 18-year-old with sending more than 1.5 million automated instant messages advertising pornography and mortgages last fall.

Even though children and teens are the most prolific instant messengers, spim presents a special problem for business.



That's because most personal IM programs allow users to block incoming messages from senders that aren't on their buddy lists; young Danny (or his parents) can keep out offending spim simply by letting in IMs only from known buddies. But businesses can't always take that extreme approach, and the volume of corporationwide instant

messaging makes companies especially vulnerable to the risks of virus-carrying spim, as well as the lost productivity of having workers bombarded all day by invasive offers.

Now some innovators say they're solving the problem for corporate clients. Akonix, a San Diego firm, screens incoming IMs for suspicious words, phrases or malware like viruses or worms. Another system, offered by FaceTime, in Foster City, Calif., automatically responds to incoming messages from unidentified senders with a screening test that can be detected and passed by individual senders but not by computer-generated programs. In both applications, the troubling messages are weeded out before the recipient is bothered—leaving workers free to concentrate on IM'ing their friends and colleagues with the latest joke or office gossip. —L.S.



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