

## **Review of McAfee's SpamKiller**

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Email is nearly as common as the land-line telephone. Unfortunately both are subject to a pernicious "disease": dinner-time interruptions in the case of telephones; spam in the case of email. But you don't have to wait for federal legislation to reduce spam. You can purchase a copy of SpamKiller - a PC-based spam filter solution - and let it "kill" spam before it reaches your email software's inbox.

Setup and installation is a snap. During installation, SpamKiller reads your address book. All email addresses are added as "friends" so that their emails won't be blocked. A preconfigured "enemies list" (that's my term, not theirs) determines what should be blocked. This list is a set of filters that block emails by examining parts of the message header such as sender, the referring domain (e.g., xxxlink.com), the subject line (e.g., "18+ only") and even the message text (e.g., "adult movie" or "free psychic"). Anything that matches the filters is blocked.

After installation there is one change you may need to make. On my test machine - Windows 98 with Outlook Express - my email program was configured to check for mail every thirty minutes. SpamKiller recommends turning off this feature. Instead, you should allow SpamKiller to check, and filter, email on a periodic basis. As it runs in your system tray it will automatically download and install new filters when they are available and pop up a message to let you know when new mail has arrived. To read your mail, you just start up your email software (if it is not already running) and download new messages without worrying about downloading spam. If any spam slips through the "enemies list" (this can happen when there is no defined filter for a particular sender, subject, message text, etc.) you can define your own filter based on a part of the email you select: sender, message text, or some other parameter.

So, does it work? The answer is a qualified "yes" and the qualification has less to do with SpamKiller than with spammers. If there is a filter for a particular type of email, it will stop it. However, getting the spam to stop coming altogether is another story. SpamKiller allows you to send a generic error message which tells the spammer that the email could not be delivered. It is unlikely, though, that the spammer really cares. Once you are on a spammer's list you're on there for life. Don't bother sending a complaint to the postmaster at the spammer's domain. Doing so lets the spammer know that he has a legitimate (i.e., working) email address and this may increase the amount of spam you receive.

One downside to using SpamKiller is when someone who is not on your "friends" list sends you an email that you want to receive. Depending on the message text and other parameters this email may get blocked. Therefore, you should periodically scan through the "killed" mail to see if SpamKiller inadvertently blocked an email that you wanted.

Despite this small caveat, SpamKiller has definitely reduced the amount of spam that gets into my "inbox." Now if it could only kill the spammer, we'd have a real "killer" application.

\$39.95 for McAfee's SpamKiller.

<http://www.spamkiller.com>