

Spam Spam Spam Spam Spam.

Some days, I wish Phill would pay attention to the “no personal calls” rule at the Levison Towers. Today, while working the switchboard, he transferred yet another call from my Aunt Lenora. I swear he did it on purpose- Phill is a little man who carries a big grudge, and can’t forgive me for switching an Etch a Sketch for his computer last year. It took him three days to notice the lack of email, and I am forever to be punished for the prank.

Being the only lawyer in my family has its drawbacks- I am the one who gets to take traffic tickets to court, and I am the one who gets blamed when laws look silly to the rational eye. And, I am the one who gets to talk to Aunt Lenora when she goes off the deep end about the law.

Maryland, Lenora’s home state, passed an anti-spam law. Maryland joined a long list of other states in restricting spam. Send spam, pay a fine, they say. New York sent a man to jail over spam, but they are less friendly than Maryland. This bothers my Aunt, who is well known in our family for her birthday Spam hash, sent right to your door, thanks to the wonders of air mail.

“No, Aunt Lenora, not spicy ham. They are just outlawing some email. Email- from computers.”

Thirty minutes later, I think she got it. Or she just gave up. The best way to get rid of some people is to say the word “computer.” Ah, the power of the geek.

For you non-geeks, a spam timeline:

1937- Hormel brings us Spicy Ham in a can.

1970, in the infamous episode 25, British comedy troupe Monty Python visit a restaurant that serves only Spam, and the spam song is born.

1994- spam is the name for anything unwanted served electronically in large quantities- spam email, spam faxes, spamming the newsgroups, etc. Spam became synonymous with bothersome and unwanted.

Spam has also been the subject of litigation. Hormel sued the Muppets when Spammy the pig was born. I don’t understand how one insults the character of a canned pork product, but Hormel did. In a non-related food note, Steak and Shake just sued Burger King over the term “Steakburger,” which Burger King modified to “Angus Steak Burger” and intends to market. Far be it from me to use the phrase “frivolous law suit.” Spam, anyone?

Speaking of computers, mine has been attacked by spammers. While I am touched by all of the folks concerned about my love life, mortgage, and need for prescription drugs, I must confess that I hate spam. So much so that I bought a spam filter for my computer, and it works pretty well. Too well, it seems- I never get email from loyal readers. (Except for you, Mom. Thanks.) Instead, my email goes through a quarantine process, and the spam gets sent to some outer hell at the e-post office. (My apologies to those who lose my column in their spam filter.)

It occurred to me that combining my two great loves- the law and computers- could certainly result in a lawyer time saver. I called Uncle Sal and got him to work on a spam filter for the law. Voila, I now have a prototype Jurispam Ray™ !

I know it was wrong to use the Jurispam Ray™ on a potential client. Astoundingly, the phone went dead after thirty seconds of discussion about her lawsuit

for an undercooked Steakburger. Ditto for three calls from salespeople with the latest timesaver for lawyers! I was disappointed to lose a telephone call from a certain insurance company sales rep, but there are friendly fire casualties in all wars.

The free time created by the Jurispam Ray™ got me thinking about the possibilities- three hour firm meetings, CLEs and scheduling conferences, all gone! Maybe junior associates could actually meet their spouses and children, having freed up many hours from each day.

Clients using the Jurispam Ray™ on their bills might also be pleasantly surprised. What happens to half hour charges for three line letters, or three day bills for cases which should have settled? Spam, away!

Judges must already have early models of Sal's device. (That would explain the quick response from Sal when I told him about my idea.) I say this after watching arguments and hearings that drone on while the judge patiently smiles. Clearly, he is listening to something else, the spam of the argument being miraculously replaced in his ears.

I would like to tell you what happens when the Ray is *actually* used in the courtroom, but alas, the metal detectors at the local courthouses screened out the Jurispam Ray™, both from my coat pocket and brief case. Probably for the best. Potential jurors would reduce questioning in *voir dire* and during trial, and hamper the legal process by weeding out the spam. Competing Ray blasts might eliminate entire law firms. I only hope Sal works out an antidote before the general public gets the Ray.

(c)2004 Under Analysis, LLC. Under Analysis is a nationally syndicated column of the Levison Group. Spencer Farris is the founding partner of The S.E. Farris Law Firm in St Louis, Missouri. Comments or criticisms about this column may be sent c/o this newspaper or directly to the Levison Group via email at comments@levisongroup.com.