Targeting Web Masters: Spamming's New Low

Posted At : December 31, 2007 12:29 PM | Posted By : Mark Kruger
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Fighting spam is a lot like those movies where blood sucking zombies just keep coming at you in a never ending supply of non-descript humanoids who want to eat your brain or take out your daughter. I can live with having to keep filters up to date. I know how to use SPF, Spam Assassin and client side filters like **spambayes** (check it out if you are an outlook user). I can even live with the bots constantly attacking my web forms and trying to hack them to send their own mail. But I think I have stumbled onto a technique that smacks of desperation.

Occasionally I view a stats report for my blog. I use **Smarter Stats** from "Smarter Tools". It's quite good and it gives me some excellent reporting options (I also love their "Smarter Mail" server). One of the reports I like to view is "referring sites". Mostly I'm just snooping to see if any CF big wigs like Ben Forta, Sean Corfield or Ray Camden have linked to my blog (we keep a bottle of champaigne on ice for those occasions). It is interesting to see all of the sites that are listed. All of our CF Webtools blogs are cross linked so I see them listed as I would expect. Google, MSN and Yahoo are all represented as are blog aggregators like **fullasagoog** and the old Macromedia weblog aggregator. Interestingly I see some international sites like soso.com and orkut.com.

All of these I can explain and understand how they arrived in my log files. But here's a couple I can't explain. There is a link to a site called "blogdim.com" - which I took to be another blog portal. When I went to the site it is actually a personal loan information site. A closer look discovered sites like "topsecuredloan","onlineapoker", "insurede" and others less benign. How are these particular referring sites getting into my log files? I have a couple of guesses.

My first guess has to do with email. If you are using a web based email client like Yahoo, and someone sends you an email with a link in it, when you click on the link the "referring site" is actually something like "mail.yahoo.com". So perhaps these sites are showing up because someone is clicking on a link in a web based email client that uses that domain. I kind of find this explanation unlikely. Would anyone really be checkign their mail at a domain like onlinepoker.com? I suppose if they were using a web host where it was set up that way it could happen.

My second guess is that someone clicked on a Google ad for Coldfusion Muse. I quickly went to my ad words account and verified that I am not set up to serve Google ads for my blog. We only serve ads for our main web site, CF Webtools.

There may be other explanations, but at least one that I can think of is that it is a new form of spam. It would be trivial to create a bot that issues web requests with a specific referrer. After all, adding your site as a referring site causes your link to show up in reports and sometimes someone (like myself) will click on it. Of course it would only target folks who are looking at web log reports. Can any muse readers provide any alternate theories? It certainly seems like an act of desperation - or perhaps just too easy to pass up. In any case, I'm off to apply for a 22% loan. Tata.