Messaging, Malware and Mobile Anti-Abuse Working Group (M³AAWG) Position on Cold Email

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m3aawg.org/M3AAWGPositionOnColdEmail

This document is focused on deceptive practices to deploy Cold Email communications that mimic or appear to be one-to-one communications, but in reality are considered spam. In email marketing terms, a "Cold Email" is an unsolicited email from otherwise legitimate, identifiable senders that tries to create a business relationship, a sale, a business opportunity, or other professional benefit from a recipient who has no prior relationship, connection, or consent with the sender or business.

Cold Emails sent in bulk often use authentication, opt-out links, and personalization (first name, title, company name, etc.) or other AI-generated content to make them look uniquely related to the recipient and appear as one-to-one communications. They may be sent at random intervals and use other misleading delivery methods, like lookalike domains[1] or multiple sending accounts, with the intention of avoiding spam filter detection.

The practice of using or facilitating deceptive delivery methods to mask Cold Emailing is in direct violation of core M³AAWG values.

Reputation metrics that indicate a sender is sending Cold Email include, but are not limited to, detection in spam traps, blocklisting, high unknown user hard bounces, and high complaint rates.

Any attempts to bypass mail volume limits, avoid spam filters, mask sending domains, artificially simulate subscriber engagement, or use other tools or services that exploit loopholes in mailbox providers or cloud platforms are particularly egregious and are not acceptable in any manner.

M³AAWG also considers that the specific form of consent received to market to an individual is not transferable between multiple marketing channels. For example, when an individual provides consent to be contacted and/or marketed to via telephone, this does not provide consent for the business to contact the individual via Cold Email.

M³AAWG's position is that using deceptive and misleading delivery methods to send unsolicited email (including Cold Email) is an abusive practice.

The guidance provided in this document is in addition to and inclusive of all email best practice guidance published by M³AAWG, including the **M3AAWG Position on Selling Email Address Lists** (URL: www.m3aawg.org/SellingEmailLists) and the **M3AAWG Position on Email Appending** (URL: www.m3aawg.org/AppendingPosition).

[1] Lookalike domains resemble legitimate domains but are actually unrelated, such as paypal-security.com for paypal.com.

