

# Breakthrough in the Fight Against Spam

**A** new tool for fighting email spam could spell the end for mass-mail viruses and phishing attacks. Experts believe the new system, called DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM), represents a real breakthrough in the battle against spam email.

The DKIM system works by validating the identity of the email sender by using a digitally encrypted signature to verify the origin of the email. Hitherto, spammers have avoided detection by using a false email address when they bombard millions of innocent inboxes with junk email.

The system has been given industry approval and a draft standard has already been approved by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), a group which represents organisations like Yahoo and Cisco. The aim is to roll out this new technology as quickly as possible to start protecting users from email spamming.

DomainKeys author Mark Delany commented: "DomainKeys Identified Mail is positioned to become the pre-eminent standard for e-mail authentication."

## How does DKIM work?

In essence, it's like having a password or 'key' embedded in your email which your email provider – for example Yahoo - can use to verify your identity. Although most email that falls into your inbox may come from known sources, the key challenge in controlling spam lies with establishing the sender's identity. Most mail servers only check if the email's domain name is known

to be favoured by spammers. Which means there's still plenty of opportunity for spam to slip through the net.

With DKIM, the email sender can include a two-part signature (ie, the 'key') within the body of the email. The email provider adds their own key to the message as it is sent to the recipient. This in turn is linked to a key held within the internet's domain name system.

The recipients mail server checks that all these keys match, thus indicating the sender is genuine and not a spammer. Both sender and recipient need to be signed up to DKIM in order for this process to work.

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