Melbourne welcomes leading international anti-spam experts

Anti-spam experts from all corners of the globe met in Melbourne in October for the 6th Joint London Action Plan—Contact Network of Spam Authorities Workshop, a three-day conference hosted by the ACMA.

The event brought together experts, regulators and law enforcement agencies from Australia and more than 13 other countries to share their experiences and develop strategies in the global fight against spam. Organised by the ACMA's Anti-Spam Team, the event was also one of the first attended by new Deputy Chair, Richard Bean, who gave the welcome address to attendees.

The London Action Plan (LAP) is a global collaboration of anti-spam regulatory authorities and industry representatives who work with the European Union's equivalent association, the Contact Network of Spam Authorities.

In her opening remarks, LAP Secretariat Shaundra Watson of the United States Federal Trade Commission said, 'Australia was chosen to host the workshop in recognition of the ACMA's global leadership in spam regulation. In addition, Australia's strong ties with its Asia–Pacific neighbours provide new opportunities for the LAP to engage with spam regulators in this region.'

This initiative proved successful with attendance by representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Korea and New Zealand, as well as other LAP participants from the US, UK, Canada, Turkey, Australia and Germany.

SMS-based spam was a frequent topic of discussion, with Australia showcasing the Spam SMS reporting service and its first SMS spam Federal Court prosecution.

From an industry perspective, Chris Althaus, from the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, provided an interesting insight into the use of mobile phones across the world. Many representatives spoke about the challenges of regulating in an environment where the ubiquity of cheap SMS deals meant mobile phone number ownership was fluid and difficult to track. Previously committed primarily to combating email spam, these discussions gave LAP members much food for thought about emerging spam trends.

Email spam remains a massive and growing problem across the world. Rob Forsyth, from SophosLabs, reported that at least 95 per cent of email was spam and the vast majority of it promoted pharmaceutical products. Despite this, Mr Forsyth noted that the effectiveness of email spam in eliciting a response was gradually reducing.

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Mr Forsyth also reported that social networking spam is on the rise, with 30 per cent of social networking users reporting phishing attacks via the website—an increase of 42.9 per cent in a year. Also, mobile internet is beginning to surpass desktop connectivity and is tipped to be the 'next big thing' for spammers.

From left: Pei-Chuen Wu, Researcher, National Communications Commission, Taiwan; Megat Muazzam Abdul Mutalib, Manager, Emergency Response MyCERT, CyberSecurity Malaysia; Masatoshi Kubota, Assistant Manager, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan; Kaoru Nishimatsu, Manager, Japan Data Communications Association; Yi-Lun Wu, Specialist, National Communications Commission, Taiwan.

Stephen Weber (left), Senior Investigator, Anti-Spam Team at the ACMA, chatting to Richard Bean, ACMA Deputy Chair and Klaus Ackerl, Legal Adviser, Austrian Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (right).

In response to this seemingly insurmountable problem, a number of representatives showcased their country's developing spam legislation and educational activities, with many using Australia's *Spam Act 2003* as a starting point for their own initiatives and enhancements.

In Canada, the Fighting Internet and Wireless Spam Act uses the consent, identification and unsubscribe rules of the Australian Spam Act, but encompasses the rise of malware and social networking spam within the draft bill. It is hoped the Canadian legislation will be finalised by December.

In Taiwan, a commitment to combating address harvesting is clear, however, there is still debate on whether to include SMS within the legislation. Other jurisdictions, such as Turkey and Malaysia, are currently considering or preparing laws against spam.

Technical solutions to the spam problem and engagement with internet service providers were also strongly favoured. Australia and Japan are leading the way in this field. The ACMA's Australian Internet Security Initiative and Spam Intelligence Database received much interest. Japan's Anti-Spam Consultation Centre coordinates between spam recipients, the government and ISPs to filter spam to ISPs for action.

A downloadable tool used in Japan to clean compromised computers provided the idea for a centralised cleaning tool for the German Anti-Botnet Advisory Centre. Once downloaded, the German cleaning tool detects malicious software and removes it from a compromised computer. This is a great example of how the LAP has allowed countries to share ideas and knowledge.

Throughout the three-day event, the need for streamlining global collaboration was repeatedly emphasised, while the need to engage with other jurisdictions was a clear outcome. The commitment shown to fighting spam by all the countries present has given the ACMA's own spam fighters an encouraging, optimistic and refreshed outlook on all their activities. ☜

For more information on the ACMA's anti-spam activities, visit the ACMA website at **www.spam.acma.gov.au**.

From left: ACMA Anti-Spam Team staff members Stephen Weber and Julia Cornwell McKean, ACMA Deputy Chair Richard Bean, LAP Secretariat Shaundra Watson and Rob Forsyth from SophosLabs.

Anti-spam talks continue

This year's face-to-face meetings of signatories of the Seoul–Melbourne Multilateral Anti-Spam Agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and Taiwan were held in Melbourne in October to coincide with the 6th Joint LAP–CNSA Workshop.

The meetings are designed to facilitate the exchange of information on anti-spam activities in the Asia–Pacific region. Guests from the Korean Internet Security Agency, the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs and the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications attended, with other regional representatives from Thailand, Hong Kong and Malaysia participating by teleconference.

The ACMA also hosted guests from the National Communications Commission of Taiwan for the second Australia–Taiwan Anti-Spam Bilateral Meeting. The annual meeting takes place as part of the Memorandum of Understanding on spam between Australia and Taiwan. Commissioner Hsiao-Leng Weng and her staff provided updates on the draft spam legislation in Taiwan.

SMS and mobile spam was a hot topic in both meetings, with efforts to manage this growing problem resulting in stronger regulation in Korea. In Taiwan, the inclusion of SMS within the new legislation is still being discussed.

The ACMA spoke about recent anti-spam activities in SMS, including the launch of the Spam SMS reporting service and the first Federal Court prosecution for SMS spam.

The two groups reinforced a commitment to continue an open dialogue on spam issues affecting all countries. ☜