INTERNET users fed up with spam can go on the offensive by downloading a screensaver aimed at hitting junkmailers in the pocket, net portal Lycos said. The screensaver - "Make Love Not Spam" - available from Lycos Europe requests data from websites that are mentioned in bulk mailings.

If thousands of screensaver users sign up, the websites' servers will be running at nearly full tilt, said Frank Legerland, a spokesman for Lycos Europe, based in Guetersloh, Germany.

The demand would slow the websites' response and hike their bandwidth bills, yet derive no income for them because there will be no response.

Those costs may discourage the sites from hiring email spammers to advertise their wares, he said.

"The aim is for a maximum reduction of 95 percent in the website's traffic, not a total shutdown," he said.

The websites have been chosen from spammers' blacklists selected by anti-spam watchdogs such as Spammcop. To make doubly sure there is no mistake, Lycos said it has also checked to make sure that the sites are selling spam goods.

A complete shutdown of websites by swamping them with demand - a "distributed denial of service" - could be considered illegal in some jurisdictions.

The Lycos scheme is questioned by some internet commentators, worried that it would generate additional megabytes of useless traffic that could strain the net's capacity.

"Seems Lycos may hurt not just spammers," the online news site The Register said.

Agence France-Presse

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