Computer buffs coined the name "spam" from a Monty Python comedy skit … but you need more than a sense of humour to cope with the reality of junk e-mail. It's estimated more than half of all e-mails are now spam and it's predicted that figure could rise to 80 percent in the next couple of years. Today, ACA explores this insidious problem.

Josh Rowe is part of the Coalition Against Bulk Unsolicited E-mail, a lobby group who've been fighting to change laws to prosecute spammers. He says a good analogy of spam in the real world is arriving home everyday and your postal letterbox was full with 100 letters and you couldn't tell which one was a "real" letter.

"I have 6000 e-mails from about two or three months and about 300 normal e-mails, so that's a 30 to one ratio, which is pretty shocking," he says.

Like road rage, spam rage is also fast becoming a common experience with consumers frustrated, inconvenienced and downright endangered, according to Enrique Salem from global anti-spam company, Brightmail, which has just launched in Australia. He says there are several dangers with spam because some contain viruses and they often contain material you don't want to see.

"Eighteen percent of spam is adult content," Enrique says. "And parents don't want their kids exposed to it."

Computer industry analyst Bruce McCabe says new regulations will have almost no effect on overall spam levels because most of our spam comes from overseas and the vast majority of the really problematic spam comes from beyond our borders. He also dismisses suggestions from big computer companies which have proposed that paying for e-mails could be another solution.

"Paying for e-mails is a very seductive idea because if we're paying a tenth of a cent for every e-mail, it's okay for you and I but it becomes an unacceptable cost for spammers who are sending out millions of these things. But the reality is, it's extremely difficult to implement and it will never be implemented, I believe, as a method of dealing with spam," he says.

So where does this leave the humble consumer? Short of closing your e-mail account altogether, there are spam filters you can buy and download but stick with a reputable server who uses products to skim e-mails for you. Or, use this trick...

"What you can do is use multiple e-mail addresses," suggests Enrique. "So, there's one e-mail address you use for everyday correspondence with friends and have another e-mail address you use for buying things online."