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 From the Los Angeles Times

## Unwanted e-mail now comes in audio format

From the Associated Press

October 23, 2007

SAN JOSE — Spam is now being served in audio form.

The latest in unwanted electronic communication is an MP3 file that began landing in in-boxes around the world last week. It features a spooky, synthesized Darth Vader-sounding female voice touting the over-the-counter stock of Exit Only Inc.

"Hello, this is an investor alert!" the halting, at times unintelligible, voice says. Her pitch invokes the growth prospects of Exit Only, a website operator that runs Text4Cars.com, which links auto buyers and sellers via text messages.

Computer security researchers say the audio blasts -- MP3 files with misleading names attached to spam e-mails -- reflect spammers' need to slip their messages through increasingly sophisticated e-mail filters.

The MP3s masquerade as cellphone ring tones or carry names such as "bartsimpson.mp3" and "justintimberlake.mp3," said Keith Crosley, director of market development for Proofpoint Inc., which sells e-mail security software and hardware.

Spammers have had to change tactics as the filters have gotten smarter at blocking traditional text-based spam, spam sent as image attachments and even the latest rage, spam hidden inside attachments created with Adobe Systems Inc.'s ubiquitous Portable Document Format, or PDF.

Santa Monica-based Exit Only said the e-mails were being sent by someone trying to pump up the company's stock before dumping it.

"It's very disheartening," Exit Only Chief Executive David Dion said. "I have enough to do on a daily basis trying to run Text4Cars. I really don't need this."

The company hired investigators to trace the origin of the e-mails, which appear to be coming from "ghost servers" in Russia, Dion said.

"Someone is trying to manipulate my stock for some kind of gain," he said. "What I can say is they have been very unsuccessful so far."

Just \$2,500 worth of stock was traded in the two days after the messages appeared, and the stock price has not benefited. The shares Monday fell 10 cents, or 25%, to 30 cents.

"This new form of spam shows a new level of sophistication for spammers and the power of the botnets," Crosley said, referring to networks of hijacked computers that are linked together without their owners' knowledge and turned into spam-sending machines.

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