

Bad grammar is the best way to recognise bogus emails

Contributed by Administrator
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Yesterday, an official-looking email arrived in my inbox. If it had been a letter, it would have come in a postage paid window envelope. The email came from services@paypal-secure.com. Its subject: "Account Suspension Warning #ID611".

Because I do not have a Paypal account I was suspicious, but what really exposed the sender's intentions was bad grammar. The first line read: "It has come to our attention that your billing information are out of order. If you could please take 5-10 minutes out of your online experience and update your personal records..." It went on about how I would have my non-existent service suspended if I did not divulge all my personal details immediately (either for the purposes of identity theft or so that my computer could be abducted and used as a zombie phishing machine).

As a rule, spammers do not pay too much attention to the finer points of grammar, syntax and spelling. Hackers are even less refined.

Take the case of Alex Tew, the 21 year-old who made a million dollars in four months after selling one million pixels on his web site for \$1 each. The Russian internet mafia tried to extort money from him by launching a denial-of-service-attack against milliondollarhomepage.com.

The ransom note read: "Hello u website is under us attack if u pay we do not ddos u site even again! and u hava a nice life :)".

The story does have a happy ending. Our web hero elicits the services of a web security company in exchange for a mention on his by-now-famous blog, the lucrative site goes live again and Alex gets to keep all his money. Because the web is largely anonymous, some use it for the purpose of absurdly ungrammatical and intentionally dyslexic expression.

The saying goes: "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog", an adage lifted from a famous New Yorker Magazine cartoon by Peter Steiner showing a dog sitting at a computer keyboard telling this to his doggy friend. Apart from a proliferation of acronyms that sometimes get so long it takes a genius to work them out (IITYWTMWYBMAD – If I Tell You What This Means Will You Buy Me a Drink?), there is the no capitals, no punctuation texting that thrives on mobile phones and in online chat rooms everywhere. In this world it is perfectly acceptable to write 'you're' as 'ur'. In fact, if you don't you probably belong to the wrong generation and risk being tagged as a groomer (a bad big person who preys on pre-adolescent cyber-natives).

There are two schools of thought on the subject: those who prophesy and protest the disappearance of the English language as we know it and blame the internet for its demise, and those who recognise the emergence of a "new literacy".

In her book *Teens, Technology, and Literacy; Or, Why Bad Grammar Isn't Always Bad* (Greenwood, 2006), Linda Braun suggests that sticklers and pedants need to accept that technology informs the way we communicate and that we should be creating awareness of this change rather than trying to correct it.

If you, like me, are rendered speechless by a spelling mistake on a billboard or on national TV, you'll be encouraged by the number of young people online who agree that a modicum of good grammar is necessary for effective communication.

In a forum called commercialsihate.com, Nathan Alexander, who looks about 14 (except that he wears a goatee), rants about a billboard meant to promote sober driving which, grammatically speaking, does just the opposite. It reads: "Don't Drink and Drive – It Saves Lives". He correctly points out that the board should read "Save Lives – Don't Drink and Drive."

In his words: "Is nobody checking this crap?"