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About Connect

The New NYUHome: Improving Community & Communication

By **Gary Chapman & Jodi Goldberg**

NYUHome, the University's web portal to a wide range of services and resources, was upgraded to version 4.0 in August 2003. Two major features of the new release reflect both the promise and the challenge of the Internet today. A new NYU Events Calendar demonstrates that web-based applications can continue to enhance our community life, while a new anti-spam service reflects the need for measures to combat the degradation of Internet communications, represented in this case by unsolicited bulk e-mail.

An Enterprise Calendar

The new NYU Events Calendar, located in the News tab within NYUHome, displays an ever-increasing number of lectures, concerts, meetings and other events taking place each day at the University. What's new is that, "under the hood", the calendar is really a collection of calendars—different campus organizations can each have their own individual calendar, with public events posted to the main University calendar as appropriate.

Thus, the new calendar is truly an enterprise application; it allows the flexibility of individual, focused use by separate groups and organizations, and the freedom to invite the entire University community to participate as interest dictates.



Figure 1. NYUHome's new Events Calendar, located in the News tab.

Customizable Spam Filtering

NYUHome's new anti-spam tool was implemented in response to frequent requests for a way to "stop the incoming SPAM!" For some people within NYU, and for many in the outside world, unsolicited and unwanted e-mail has come to represent 50% or more of the mail in their inboxes. And some of these messages are more than simply annoying; they may be considered offensive. While it may be easy for a person to tell the difference between unwanted spam and desired correspondence, it is not so easy for a computer program to tell the difference and automatically reject the junk mail. For example, a regular shopper at amazon.com or another e-commerce site might wish to receive e-mail messages from that service which, to a non-customer or filtering program, may look very much like spam. Since ITS has made a commitment that "the mail must go through," we have approached this problem with care, offering a new anti-spam feature that allows each individual person who uses NYUHome to select options which most suit his or her e-mail preferences.

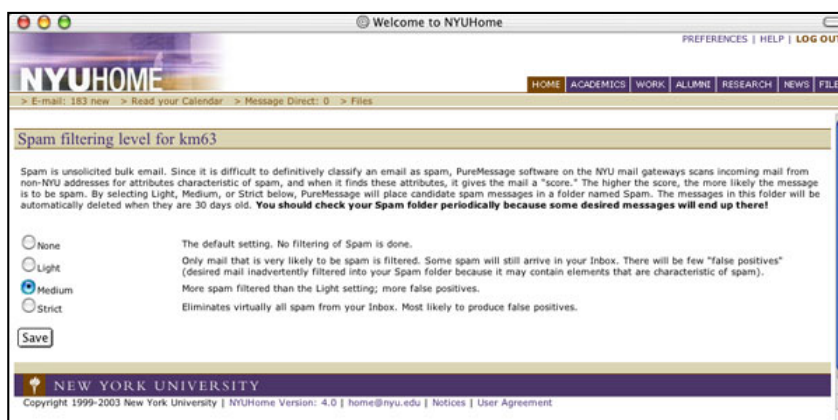


Figure 2. Spam filter settings are located in NYUHome's Preferences section.

The PureMessage anti-spam software implemented on our NYU mail gateways in version 4.0 of NYUHome scans incoming mail from outside the University for attributes characteristic of spam. When it finds these attributes, it gives the mail message a "score" before sending it on to its destination. The higher the score, the more likely the message is to be spam. This score is actually inserted into header lines that each e-mail message contains, lines containing arcane details—about routing, for example—that are normally hidden, so as to enhance the message's readability. Once mail messages are given a spam rating, it's possible for the recipient's e-mail software to take action based upon the score, with the type of action customized for each individual.

NYUHome Webmail & Desktop Client Customization

Within the NYUHome webmail client, Messenger Express, in the Preferences section, an individual can easily set the NYUHome e-mail server to automatically filter messages given a specified score (or higher) into a "Spam" folder. Several levels of filtering are available, and messages are automatically deleted from the Spam folder after 30 days.

Alternately, individuals who desire greater flexibility can instead customize a desktop e-mail client such as Eudora, Macintosh Mail (for OS X), Netscape Messenger, Outlook (PC only) and Outlook Express (Macintosh only) to handle the incoming messages in exactly the way they want by configuring e-mail filters.

For more information, see "[Take Back Your Inbox!](#)", or check the NYUHome Help on spam filtering, <http://home.nyu.edu/help/mail/spamfilter.nyu>.

Check Your Spam Folder

It is important to remember that, whether you enable automatic spam filtering via NYUHome or set up your own customized spam-handling filters in a desktop e-mail client, some legitimate messages will occasionally be categorized as spam and land in your spam or Trash folder by mistake. For example, messages containing many capital letters or exclamation points, or phrases such as "click here", are often assigned a high spam rating. Therefore, it is important to check your spam or Trash folder regularly to ensure that you do not miss any legitimate messages.

We hope that everyone enjoys the new NYU Events Calendar, and benefits from the anti-spam filtering service now offered by NYUHome. For information about additional features of NYUHome version 4.0 and for news about upcoming enhancements, visit <http://home.nyu.edu/about/version/>. Please send your comments and questions about NYUHome to home@nyu.edu.

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