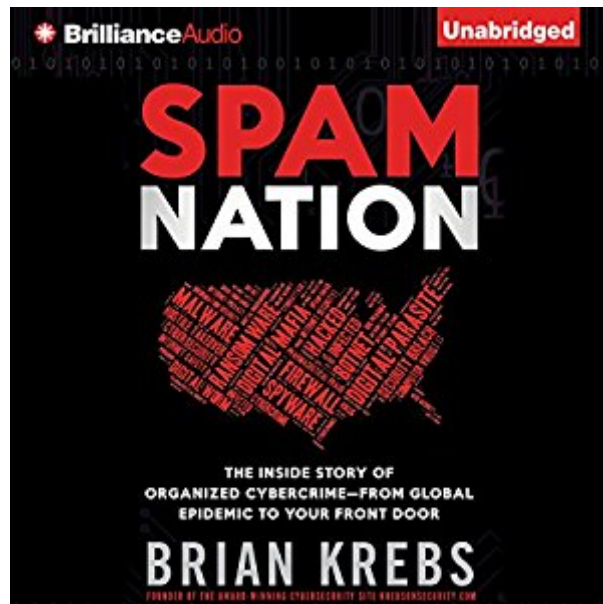


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# Spam Nation: The Inside Story Of Organized Cybercrime - From Global Epidemic To Your Front Door



## Synopsis

There is a Threat Lurking Online with the Power to Destroy Your Finances, Steal Your Personal Data, and Endanger Your Life. In *Spam Nation*, investigative journalist and cybersecurity expert Brian Krebs unmask the criminal masterminds driving some of the biggest spam and hacker operations targeting Americans and their bank accounts. Tracing the rise, fall, and alarming resurrection of the digital mafia behind the two largest spam pharmacies - and countless viruses, phishing, and spyware attacks - he delivers the first definitive narrative of the global spam problem and its threat to consumers everywhere.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 46 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Brilliance Audio

Audible.com Release Date: November 18, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00P1L1WRI

Best Sellers Rank: #3 in Books > Business & Money > Industries > Pharmaceutical &

Biotechnology #14 in Books > Computers & Technology > Security & Encryption > Viruses #30 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Organized Crime

## Customer Reviews

Spam is a Russian industry. There are competitors, partnerships, even contests for most responses. Incredibly (to us), spam delivered in Russia actually offers links to spamming services at the bottom of the spam, so that your business too, can benefit. The drug spam industry is financed by American consumers, who want to save money, avoid going to doctors, or even deal prescription drugs to others. The spammers fill a genuine void and satisfy a genuine demand in a twisted healthcare system. This is the story that Brian Krebs reveals, in dramatic, fascinating and fine detail. The online "pharmacies" contract with fakes in India and China, just like the majors do. Goods are shipped by them directly to the customer. Refunds are easier to obtain than from US firms, because the spammers don't want their card processors to fine them or cut them off. And better customer service leads to reorders (!). And if they don't, aggressive

outbound telemarketing takes over. They have supply chains, with acquirers of botnets, renters of botnets, pharmacies, affiliate programs and spammers – all getting a cut of the transaction or an upfront fee. So very few get crazy rich. Some had to take legitimate day jobs to make ends meet. Eventually, those legitimate tech jobs became more attractive than the dark ones, so recruiting became a problem. Truly, a parallel universe. The drug spam segment is in clear decline:1) The Achilles Heel of the spammers is that they are not totally vertical. They can collect e-mail addresses, they can create botnets, they can accept and fulfill orders. But they can't process payment. So credit card companies and Microsoft have gone after banks, card processors and transfer agents, making business impossible for the drug spammers. They built their own universe with their own rules, but stopped short. Eventually, it had to collapse.2) The other weak link is Russia, which harbored them. How long that would last was always questionable, but Russia is so corrupt that spammers bribed officials to investigate and close down their competitors. It was a war of attrition where eventually everyone had to lose. Overall, it was a self-inflicted, two pronged attack on itself. And it's not all a semi-legitimate economy. They also evolved from scareware (your computer is not safe) to ransomware (all your files are now encrypted). And there's the constant selling of personal information. Krebs follows a cast of kingpins through their rise and fall. It's a passion that cost him his career at the Washington Post, which changed policy – so he could no longer publish his blockbuster stories. (Krebs had been the reason for the crippling and shutdown of major botnets, himself) He has kept going, following through to the end of the kingpin rule, and ends the book with tips on not just how, but why you need to protect your accounts. It's all chilling and gripping, and unfortunately real. David Wineberg

TLDR - fascinating topic by a very knowledgeable author, but not well executed or well written. I am a regular reader of krebsonsecurity.com, and will continue to be. I really enjoy Krebs's insight into cybercrime, and the revelations about technology and society that come with it. My appreciation for his blog made me excited to read his book, but unfortunately it came up short. There were many interesting facts, but it was as if he didn't have a clear vision of what he was synthesizing them for. The tone of the writing was very inconsistent. Sometimes it reads like a pulp spy novel, sometimes a memoir, sometimes an academic paper. Events that don't seem very dramatic are dramatized at length, and other fascinating tidbits are mentioned but not followed up. This confusion about intent and audience makes for a very jarring read. Sometimes technical terms are insufficiently defined. Other terms are unnecessarily defined and explained many times in the book. The structure of the

book doesn't suit the topic. He frequently refers the reader to other parts of the book, yet it isn't apparent why the information is in the other part of the book rather than where he mentions it by reference.

SPAM NATION is a detailed chronicle of the spam and illegal pharmaceutical online scammers that plague the internet. The author explains that a large proportion of the pharma spam originates from really just a few individuals in Russia. The author includes a very useful "Who's Who" in the cyberworld section, right at the beginning of this book. It explains who the main players are in the spam and pharma schemes. Much of the book discusses the competing criminal networks in Russia, and how these gangs try to thwart each other. Sometimes they expose their competitors private information to the authorities, hoping the police will take down the opposition. Eventually, many of these criminals would end up being arrested and many will have to serve at least a few years in prison. The author spends a lot of time explaining the schemes of "botnets," which are networks of rogue computers controlled by the bot masters. The criminals use these to steal information, send out billions of spam, or even hijack the computer and hold it for ransom until the owner pays a fine. The botnet armies can be extremely powerful and damaging to the public. There was some online chats that were leaked, showing how the criminals actually use these botnet armies: "They were using their armies to bludgeon someone or something offline that threatened to kill their criminal operations. Very often, rival spammers would turn their digital armaments on one another." For me, the most interesting part of SPAM NATION were the chapters describing the financial processing--that is, how the criminals manage to charge your credit card. A set of researchers--some associated with Cal Berkeley, set up test credit card accounts, which they used to buy some counterfeit pharmaceuticals. Then, they would endeavor to track down which banks were actually processing the customers' credit cards. They discovered that there were only a handful of banks that were involved. One researcher was especially clever, in that he simply called around credit card companies, until he found some executives that would cooperate with this investigation. The researchers discovered that the spammers were very careful about screening credit cards that might just be traps. As a result of this investigation, the credit card processing companies were pressured into more vigilantly enforcing the rules. This also caught the attention of Congress. The author describes one bizarre adventure, which he calls, taking an "icebreaker cruise," to Russia to meet with one of the most notorious scammers in the entire world. It was an unpleasant trip, encountering shady people in scary places. The author states that he was actually afraid to meet with some of the other criminals behind these schemes. All in all, SPAM NATION is an

interesting read. It exposes the magnitude of these nefarious scams, as well as the intricacies of the serpentine network behind these scammers. I thought the text dragged a bit in the sections discussing all of the Russian operatives, but in general, SPAM NATION is a very interesting (and a bit, scary) read. Recommend! Review copy courtesy of the distributor.

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