

## A 'reunion' that left her embarrassed

February 4 2009, By Steve Alexander

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Q. In December, I was contacted by 16 former colleagues and friends who had received "invitations" from me through Reunion.com, a Web site I had never visited. It was quite embarrassing, because the colleagues were at a level where I would not even be e-mailing them directly, let alone asking them to join me on some nonprofessional Web site.

I complained to Reunion.com as well as a "watchdog group" listed on their site, TRUSTe. Two weeks later I got a response from Reunion, saying they had contacted me and the situation was resolved. They had not contacted me. Nor did I ever hear from TRUSTe.

The damage is done. I hope all has been understood, forgiven and forgotten by the individuals who received the inappropriate e-mails. What should I do if this ever happens again?

A. TRUSTe says you were the victim of a scam that was carried out on Reunion.com, which is designed to help consumers contact old friends. Someone who knew your personal e-mail information apparently signed you up for the Web site without your knowledge. That person then took advantage of a Reunion.com option: If a member gives the Web site the login and password to his or her AOL, Gmail, Yahoo, or Hotmail e-mail account, the site will scan the e-mail contact list for people who aren't Web site members. It will then send them several e-mail invitations to join. That apparently generated the unwanted invitations to your colleagues.

Reunion.com has closed your account, but what else can you do to

protect yourself? Change your AOL login and password.

Q. I was puzzled when I was unable to send e-mails, but learned from my Internet service provider that I had exceeded my daily allotment. I ran my antivirus and anti-spyware programs, and changed my e-mail password four times. I haven't had a problem since, but what happened?

A. I suspect your PC was being used by someone on the Internet to send junk e-mail or spam. When your Internet service detected a lot of e-mail from your PC, it blocked your e-mail account.

Your quick response with antivirus and anti-spyware programs probably eradicated the hostile software that controlled your PC. (Such programs can be innocently acquired from malicious Web sites or e-mail attachments.)

Experts say that thousands of PCs around the world have been at least temporarily turned into spam-sending robots, or bots.

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