

Mailing List Pro User Guide

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Introduction

Mailing lists are one of the best ways to share information on the Internet, and an excellent way to stay in touch with your web site users, keep them coming back and even generate some advertising revenue. Using a mailing list, you are able to set up a number of electronic newsletters that users can subscribe to. On a regular basis you can write an issue of a newsletter and send it off to all subscribers via e-mail. You can use your newsletters as an information resource, an advertising channel and a marketing tool. Not to mention, of course, that they add real and engaging content to your web presence.

Mailing List Pro, developed for use with our pre-installed database, allows you to create a feature-full mailing list, and manage it with a range of easy to use tools. The mailing list features support for multiple newsletters, individual newsletter subscription, compulsory newsletter subscriptions, announcements, broadcasts, HTML enriched e-mail, e-mail preview, member addition confirmation, e-mail archiving and back issues. Administration of the mailing list is supported with default newsletter contents and a control panel for mailing list members.

Essentials

The mailing list consists of two major sections. The first section is the admin interface. The interface is designed for your use, and your use only. This section is password protected. Username and password are provided by your system administrator or webmaster. The second section is the member control panel. In this section, members can enter their e-mail address to subscribe and unsubscribe themselves from newsletters, request back issues of newsletters that they are subscribed to and remove themselves from the list. New members can also sign up to the mailing list through this page, so you will probably want to add a link to this page in a prominent place on your web page. A member is required to enter their e-mail address and password to access this section.

Definitions

There are some terms commonly used throughout the mailing list that you will need to become familiar with:

1. A *member* is a person who has added their e-mail address to your mailing list.
2. Much of the mailing list centres on *newsletters*. Newsletters are usually focused on a particular subject and *issues* of the newsletter are usually distributed by e-mail on a regular, scheduled basis. For example, you may have an Automotive newsletter that is e-mailed out every month with the latest in automotive news.
3. Members *subscribe* to newsletters through the member control panel. Once they have subscribed to a newsletter they will receive each issue of that newsletter when it is

- distributed. A user can subscribe to any number of newsletters that you have created. They can also *unsubscribe*, which means they will stop receiving issues of a newsletter.
4. Members who have subscribed to a particular newsletter can request *back issues* of that newsletter. Requesting a back issue means being sent a previous issue of the newsletter that a member has missed out on, or wishes to receive again.
 5. To send an unscheduled e-mail to subscribers of a particular newsletter, you can use an *announcement*. Announcements are stored separately from newsletter issues. You may like to use an announcement for administrative purposes, or to let members know of a change in direction of the newsletter and so on.
 6. To contact all members of the mailing list, regardless of which newsletters they are subscribed to, you can use a *broadcast*. Broadcasts are stored separately from both issues and announcements.

The File Interface

The file interface allows you to manage all aspects of the mailing list. To begin with, you will want to add at least one newsletter to your mailing list. This can be done through the *Manage Newsletters* page. In future, you can also edit and delete newsletters through this page. If you have an existing mailing list that you are porting over to your database, you can add new members to the list using the *Manage Members* page.

The file interface is also the place where you will send newsletter issues, announcements and broadcasts. You can send these through the *Send Issue*, *Send Announcement* and *Send Broadcast* pages respectively. Any related instructions and information that you may require is given to you on these pages.

The Member Control Panel

The member control panel allows both yourself and members to edit their subscription details. The first page of the control panel asks for an existing member's e-mail address, or the address of a new member to add to the list. You will probably wish to link to this control panel from your web page to advertise your mailing list and to invite new users to sign up to it.

When a new member enters their e-mail address to sign up, they are added to the list in pending status. A welcome e-mail is sent to their address immediately with details on how to confirm their addition and subscribe to the various newsletters that you have made available. The welcome e-mail contains a URL with a secret key to authorize their addition to the list. Once they have visited this URL, they will be confirmed and taken to the subscription control panel. The idea of this process is to ensure that users do not sign up addresses other than their own. Obviously, the welcome e-mail with the secret code can only be received by the real owner of an address, and so only the real owner can confirm their addition to the list.

When an existing member has entered their e-mail address, they will be taken to a subscription details page. On this page, they can see the name and description of all newsletters in the mailing list, and with a single click can subscribe or unsubscribe from any of them. They can also request back issues from newsletters to which they have subscribed. If selecting this option, they will be taken to a page with a list of issues to pick from. Back issues will be sent to them by e-mail. Only the latest 100 issues for a newsletter can be displayed, which should be plenty for them! Note also that the database will not allow a member to send themselves the same back issue more than once an hour, so as to prevent unnecessary use of your mail server.

For a member to remove themselves from the mailing list entirely, they need only select the option to do so in their control panel.

Netiquette

A word on netiquette is necessary here. Netiquette, as suggested by its name, is etiquette for the Internet, and it applies particularly to e-mail and mailing lists. Be sure to follow these rules when running your mailing list:

- Use appropriate subjects in all e-mail that you send, whether it be newsletter issues, announcements or broadcasts. Don't be deceptive, and avoid sneaky marketing techniques, as tempting as they may sound. As part of this, don't put YOUR SUBJECTS IN ALL CAPS. It is annoying, hard to read and won't leave your members with a positive impression of you or your mailing list.
- Always include information in your e-mails as to how a user may unsubscribe from your mailing list. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, it is possible that a person will sign someone else up to the list without the consent of that person. That person may have no idea how they were subscribed, much less how they can unsubscribe. Secondly, it is just courteous to give members the freedom to subscribe and unsubscribe at will. A message along the following lines is suggested at the bottom of all your mailing list messages:
- Visit the Member Control panel to manage your subscriptions and unsubscribe.
- Lastly, and most importantly, never send spam e-mail. Spam is sending e-mail to a large number of people who have not requested it and who you have had no prior correspondence with. It is often of a commercial or even scam-like nature, but does not have to be. The general rule is to not send mail to anyone who has not subscribed themselves to your list. In other words, don't add e-mails to the list yourself, let their owners subscribe them.

Setting Up

The configuration has already been done for you by your system administrator or webmaster.

You may like to modify the templates for your mailing list pages, although this is certainly not required. For basic colour changes and so forth, you need only modify the SystemCustomise table datasheet. This datasheet contains the custom colours and fonts for the mailing list pages. You may find the colour chart of assistance for getting the hexadecimal code corresponding to each colour that you wish to enter into this datasheet. If you wish to customise the member control panel further, the relevant templates are in the *reports/html* directory, and can be accessed through the template editor.

Further Information

Advanced users planning to customise the mailing list further may benefit from the following information:

- When a newsletter is deleted, it is not actually removed from the database, but rather just made invisible. You can restore a newsletter, including all its subscriptions and e-mails by modifying the *Newsletter* table datasheet. On this page you will notice a true/false checkbox field of the name *Deleted*. A checked box here indicates a deleted newsletter, so that you can simply uncheck the box of a deleted newsletter and save the datasheet to fully restore the newsletter.
- As tempting as it may be to take advantage of ML Pro's features to send personalised e-mails to members, this is not recommended for technical reasons. By default, each time you send a message your server only has to create a single e-mail, and then duplicate and send it to each of the recipients. Personalising e-mails requires an individual e-mail

to be constructed and sent to each user. This means a new connection to your mail program or reset connection to your SMTP server for each member, slowing the process drastically and potentially putting a heavy load on your server. It is indeed possible to personalise e-mails, just not recommended.

- By default, e-mails are sent through the mailing list as plain text. If you'd like to enrich your e-mails with HTML code to add text formatting and the like, simply turn on the *Send e-mails as HTML* option through the file settings page of the admin system. You can then add HTML tags into your e-mail messages when composing them.

Support

Please contact Support at support@ibdev.com.

Internet Business Developers - <http://www.ibdev.com>