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**The 'ListBot Dilemma' and List Hosting Alternatives**

**By Angela Wu**

**The 'ListBot Dilemma' and List Hosting Alternatives by Angela Wu**

I'm disgusted.

On June 22, 2001, one of the most popular list hosts announced that it was replacing it's excellent service with a 'new and improved' version. We have to save all our subscriber lists and archives by August 20, or they'll be lost forever – unless, of course, we upgrade to their new service.

You might already know that I'm talking about ListBot. Yes, the extremely popular ListBot is to be replaced with something called 'ListBuilder'.

Now I don't begrudge them for eliminating the 'free ListBot'; they're a business, after all, and they have to try to remain profitable. What bothers me is that they don't seem to care one whit about what this means to their customers – free AND paying customers.

Let me add that they had a lot of loyal customers – people who loved their service and were willing, even happy, to pay for it. I was one of them ... until recently.

This change has a big effect on those of us who used ListBot to manage our newsletters. Our ListBot subscription links will now be defunct. In other words, years of hard work promoting our subscription links – in articles, eBooks, links, and so on – are completely \*wasted\*.

THAT is why I'm disgusted. It's hard to believe that ListBot would behave so callously towards their loyal, paying fans.

My trust is broken. I loved ListBot. I \*don't\*, however, love what they've done. So instead of upgrading to their new ListBuilder service, I went looking for another solution.

### SCRIPTS

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One option is to purchase a script to manage your list. Two such examples are:

- == Opt-in Lightning, <http://www.optinlightning.com/>
- == Mail Master Pro, <http://www.cgitoolbox.com/package.html>

With scripts, there's a number of things to consider. For example, does your web host allow you to install and run scripts? Is there an extra charge for doing so? Do you know how to install a script – or know someone who can do it for you?

On the good side, once installed, your list management is completely under your control. No more relying on another company to handle your newsletter! You typically pay a one-time purchase fee for the script (and possibly the installation as well) and it's yours to use forever.

### FREE LIST HOSTS

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ListBot used to have a free version (ad-supported). If you're determined to only use a free list host, two of the most popular are:

- == Yahoo Groups, <http://groups.yahoo.com/>
- == Topica, <http://www.topica.com/>

If, however, you choose to use a free service, be aware that although they're free \*now\*, they may not \*remain\* free. At any time they could choose to start charging for their services (like so many previously 'free' online services have done) ... or they could withdraw services

altogether.

Heck, ListBot was run by Microsoft. If Microsoft couldn't make it work, how much longer do you think these other services will remain free?

## FEE-BASED LIST HOSTS

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While searching for a solution to my 'ListBot dilemma', I came across a large number of list hosts. What I was looking for was a host that could provide all the usual newsletter management features, along with reliability and a strong dedication to customer service.

In terms of money, fee-based list hosts usually work on

a subscription basis. You pay a fee periodically (every month, quarter, or year, for example) in exchange for the ability to send a certain number of messages each month. Some list hosts will charge you based on how many messages you send (for example, \$1 for every 1000 messages).

Two list hosts that were highly recommended to me are:

== SparkList, <http://www.sparklist.com/services/hosting/>  
== ListChannel, <http://buildyourhomebiz.com/listchannel.html>

I finally chose to go with ListChannel (SparkList has a minimum of \$50/month, which is more than I want to spend). So far I'm happy with ListChannel: it's fast, reliable, and their customer service is consistently prompt and helpful.

If you're a 'ListBot Refugee', ListChannel has set up a special discount for you (good only until August 20, 2001):  
<http://buildyourhomebiz.com/listbotspecial.html>

Angela is the editor of the Netpreneur's Notebook Ezine, a newsletter for online business 'newbies'. Pick up your free subscription today by visiting <http://buildyourhomebiz.com/newsletter.html>

## List Host Nightmares!

**By Mike Banks Valentine**

## **List Host Nightmares! by Mike Banks Valentine**

For three weeks as I was putting out my weekly newsletter, I saw a promotion on the log-in screen at my list host, ListBot Gold, suggesting I could upgrade from Listbot Gold to a new bCentral service being launched called ListBuilder. It would give me the opportunity to gather more demographic info from subscribers and provide the ability to send HTML email to those who choose it on subscribing.

I'd been wanting to be able to provide advertisers a better picture of my subscriber base to garner more advertising for the Reading List. I was anxious to try it after considering the idea, so the second week I saw the promotion on the log-in screen at ListBot, I took the bait and clicked the "Upgrade Free" link. The greeting properly warned me that switching over now could delay delivery of my newsletter for a time while migration of the list took place. Oh well, I'm on Sunday night deadline for my Monday a.m. delivery time, so I put it off another week.

Next week I checked in to ListBot a couple of days early to upgrade and allow the "migration time" of the list. I went through the online set-up and was glad to see that the list had been moved to ListBuilder in short order and was ready to go by mailing time a full day before the next Reading List was due to go out. I updated the subscribe links on over 100 pages of my site to reflect the new sign-up boxes offered by ListBuilder and had a twinge of nervousness while thinking, "What if I don't like this new service and the way it works? I've just cost myself some valuable time and will have to switch back to ListBot links."

I knew that I could "restore" my list after deleting it because I had seen that link at ListBot for years while sending out my newsletter. "Your list can always be restored later if you change your mind." So I continued, sent out the first issue through ListBuilder and woke up Monday morning to another twinge of doubt. Should I have downloaded my subscriber list before migrating in case of a problem? Damn, I should have thought of that.

Seems there was no problem as I received my own copy of

Reading List, but I didn't receive the usual spate of

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autoresponder messages telling me that people were out of the office temporarily or that they had received my message. I quickly went to the public archive for my list at ListBot and checked to find it . . . "DELETED!"

Full scale panic set in and I quickly logged in to ListBuilder to see that my archives had been moved successfully there and managed to calm my adrenalin rush after a few minutes of hyperventilating. I looked for a way to view the archive without logging in as I'd posted links on my site to the public archive of ListBot for the Reading List. They're all broken now!

More changes to my site and searching for archive links throughout my site! Damn! After spending the next full week copying my archive from the new ListBuilder PRIVATE list owner archive, tediously cutting and pasting to my own site all of the previous issues and finally changing the remaining links on my site to reflect hosting of my own archive, I sighed relief. It was over.

But, no, a new panic set in to my tired mind. What if the email subscribe link that I had promoted for two full years in my articles sent to other lists for distribution had stopped working as well?! I sent a test email and found to my immediate dismay that new subscribers to the Reading List were getting the terse message, "List Cancelled, Sorry, mail is not processed for lists that are cancelled."

I think I wanna die now. Full scale depression sets in and I dredge up the energy to send a note to both ListBot Gold and to ListBuilder support teams that I've got a real problem with the way this whole thing went, begging for some sort of solution from them and got two canned responses saying,

"subject:RE: CST34553119ID

We appreciate any ideas you may have concerning a resolution to this problem. I will be glad to forward them to the Product team. Rest assured that we are continually seeking ways to bring you the best email list service there is."

I'm literally screaming, "Help! I've been seriously injured and need medical attention to save the life of my list before it bleeds to death!" They're standing beside me scratching

their skulls saying, "Gee, got any ideas on what we could do to help? I wanna be a doctor some day." I want these guys

to be the first on the scene of any accident I'm involved in!

I went back to my ListBot Gold account and hit that link that said "Restore a deleted list" and found to my relief that it worked and I now had an active list in both places. I'll just have to import the new subscribers manually each week to the ListBuilder account for everyone that sees my articles and uses the subscribe link available from my resource box of articles published in the archives of dozens of large lists where my articles had been featured over the last two years or so.

I'll definitely look closely at any such new changes to be certain they don't affect my business on that scale in the future. This has nothing to do with the value or utility of the service. I'm just outraged that I wasn't warned of the problems that occurred here. MSN bCentral didn't warn me that all my subscribe links would be broken, they didn't say I'd need to change all my subscription boxes sitewide, they didn't say the change would take my previously public archive private and they didn't warn of any potential problems the change might pose. They were incredibly short-sighted in promoting the "upgrade" to existing paying clients without posing any potential "issues" related to the change.

I'd recommend that each of those items be clearly stated along with the current warning that "Migration may cause a delay in delivery", which caused me to delay signing up until it wouldn't create that problem. If I'd foreseen the other issues myself, I'd still have made the move, but only after reconciling the problems. The warnings should have been posted and if they don't do it now, I'd be surprised if others didn't consider taking legal action.

Friday June 22, ListBot Gold customers were notified that the service was to be "Shut Down" by August 20 and those who fail to migrate to the ListBuilder service will lose their data. Essentially saying to subscribers of the service that they could care less how it affects them and by the way, hurry up and get your stuff outta here. Almost like a bitter spouse booting her cheating hubby rather than a paid service

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that should respect those long-time customers and the income they bring.

Current ListBot Customers who would like to move their list to a decent host, we've arranged a special deal for you. Visit:

[http://website101.com/listbot\\_members.html](http://website101.com/listbot_members.html) for one month free

hosting of your own newsletter, ezine or discussion list.

Mike Banks ValentineWebSite101 "Reading List" Weekly Netpreneur Tip Sheet Weekly Ezine emphasizing small business on the Internet <http://website101.com/arch/e-tutorial> online at: <http://website101.com/shortcourse.html> By week's end you're ready expand your business to the web!



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