

This Passport PREVENTS Travel!

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By Mike Valentine

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Last week Microsoft bCentral required all users of it's ListBuilder Service to sign up for and use the Microsoft .NET passport system by converting to that system before allowing log-in to their existing accounts.

I normally distribute my list through ListBuilder on Sunday evening for delivery by Monday morning to my subscribers. I got NO NOTICE there was to be a change to the system until I tried to log in to my list last Sunday evening, December 3, and couldn't.

The sign in system crashed my Netscape Browser twice, so I opened up Explorer 5 and it just locked into a loop of agreeing to the terms of service, I mark the "Agree" radio button and click "next" to be returned to the terms of service agreement over and over again. I give up with Explorer and return to Netscape. Now my computer freezes entirely. I give up after 2 hours of trying different approaches. The "Help" screen is worthless.

Monday A.M. I try to log in again on Netscape and go through the process again at bCentral. Now when I click the "Next" button . . . NOTHING HAPPENS AT ALL! I open Explorer 5 and try again to get back to the terms of service feedback loop once again. Click the button that says "I Agree" to the TOS and get returned back the default "I do not agree" button checked over and over again.

I call customer support. I wait on hold for 45 minutes before giving up fed up with the awful loop of loud Christmas music I've heard repeatedly, along with that wonderful recorded, "All of our customer service representatives are busy. Please hold and your call will be

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answered in the order received" Well either there is one person that can't get satisfaction who won't hang up or there are six hundred angry callers ahead of me (or both). I give up. I try again, for a WEEK!

I still don't have my ezine out two issues later, I still can't get through the customer support phone waiting list. I sent an email to bCentral support and got no answer. I have a paid advertiser for the ezine and now I've got to explain that I'm locked out of my list host and refund the money.

This has got to be one of Microsofts' finest hours. I could care less about passport as I never intend to use it for anything but this

service and will not share my personal info with them to save my life after this debacle. So I'm willing to sign up for passport for ListBuilder only, but all I want to do is access and distribute my newsletter! My subscribers and advertisers will love me for this absurdity!

After attempting for a full week to send out two issues of my newsletter, that I can't get by the ridiculous feedback loop of agreeing to the terms of service over and over again or getting signed in with the passport I create but then being prompted to convert my account to passport. When I follow instructions I still get the following message.

"The Microsoft .NET Passport you used to sign in is valid, but we cannot locate your bCentral account"

When I attempt to convert again, I get the message over again. I still can't get through on the phone and cannot afford to spend much more time trying.

They have not answered my queries sent to support and now I've gone two weeks without sending my newsletter out. I sent a post to LinkExchange Digest, but of course as a Microsoft sponsored publication, they won't publish my complaints.

I'm locked out of my account, I have only a two month old subscriber list for backup and I can't get any attention. This is the most absurd thing I've seen since trying to change registrars from Network Solutions to a helpful and reasonable vendor that charges less and actually talks to me when I need help.

We're forced to use passport, but then can't convert from our previous account when we establish a passport. This behavior could only come from a corporate behemoth that doesn't give a flying @\$% about individual

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customers. Only the mass market. And then only when they don't complain.

I found a page at bCentral for support phone calls and found that phone support costs \$9.95 monthly with a minimum commitment of one year! or you can save \$20 and pay for the year in advance. So, in essence, you can pay us now or pay us more now. But wait, at the bottom of the page it says the following:

bCentral Subscriber Phone Support is available to current subscribers of:

Traffic Builder
Commerce Manager
Customer Manager

So the truth is that you can't even PAY to talk to them about

ListBuilder! Does anyone find this in the least bit objectionable? I've never seen worse customer service for paying customers anywhere!

Can you imagine signing up for the .NET passport wallet and getting this kind of help when they have control of your money at (if they get the adoption they are hoping for) HUNDREDS or even thousands of sites across the web? This ought to be a warning call for those considering handing over personal information to passport and .NET and a clear signal that they won't provide customer support when you have trouble with it.

Mike Valentine does Search Engine Placement for the SmallBusiness
http://website101.com/Search_Engine_PositioningWebSite101 "Reading List" Weekly Netpreneur
Tip Sheet Weekly Ezine emphasizing small business on the Internet <http://website101.com/arch/>

Get Your U.S. Passport Fast

By William Manor

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Where do you turn when you need to get your passport in a hurry? The U.S. Department of State Passport Services claims to process passports in six weeks for regular services and in two weeks for expedited services. Neither is guaranteed and it often takes longer, especially during peak travel season.

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To get your passport processed and returned to you within 10 business days to as little as 24 hours, you have to rely on a private passport expeditor.

The National Association of Passport and Visa Services says that there are approximately 100 expeditors operating in the United States. If you plan to use one of these services, choose one that has an easy-to-follow application process, online tracking, money-back guarantee and reasonable fees.

To read reviews of online expeditors and get helpful tips for getting your passport, visit our web site <http://www.us-passport-service-guide.com>

William Manor is the owner of U.S. Passport Service Guide, a very useful and comprehensive resource for U.S. citizens who travel internationally.



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