

Manage Your Subscriber Lists Part 2

By Alexandria K. Brown

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Boost Business With Your Own E-zine <http://www.ezinequeen.com>

If you're ready to begin publishing your own e-mail newsletter, or 'e-zine,' you basically have three options to manage your subscriber list:

1. Do it yourself with your current, everyday e-mail program.
2. Sign on with an online list service to manage it all for you.
3. Purchase list management software to use on your own computer.

Today, we'll review option two, using an online list service.

An online list service (or 'listserve') automatically handles all subscribe and unsubscribe requests. You never have to touch your list! Users either send an e-mail to a certain address at the service or visit a particular Web page to subscribe and unsubscribe. And your list should be safe and sound if you choose a reputable company. (Although not always guaranteed -- see editor's note above.)

There are many online services available, but you want to be careful whom you trust. Here are some guidelines.

FIRST TALK WITH YOUR CURRENT HOSTING COMPANY.

Do you have a Web site? If so, you pay a monthly bill for it to be 'hosted' on a server somewhere. Web hosting has become so competitive, that many hosting companies offer affordable packages complete with list capabilities. In fact, you may already have this option in your current hosting package! (When I started my first e-zine several years ago, I was delighted to learn this was the case.)

If list services aren't included in your monthly fee, your host may be able to add on the option.

FIND A PROFESSIONAL FEE-BASED LIST SERVICE

If your Web host can't help you, or you're not confident in their services, start shopping around. For about the same price as your basic monthly phone bill, you can sign up for a headache-free list

service.

Most start at only \$25 a month and require a one-time setup fee (usually less than \$50). Pricing factors can include your number of subscribers, your publishing frequency, and the size of your messages (for example, an HTML message with five photos is a much larger file than a text message such as this one).

There are many reputable services out there, but here are a few to get you started:

Listserve.com (\$15-60 per month, depending on list size)

<http://www.listserve.com/>

Microsoft List Builder (\$25+/mo., free 30-day trial)

<http://www.bcentral.com/services/lb/default.asp>

Topica E-mail Publisher (\$19+/mo., basic features)

<http://www.email-publisher.com/signup/>

ON A TIGHT BUDGET? CHECK OUT SOME REPUTABLE FREE SERVICES

If you're working on a shoestring budget, then a free service is a great option. I'm impressed with how easy these services make it to start your lists, and they provide some other neat features such as automatic online archiving.

Now, of course, anything 'free' always has a downside. Actually, I count three here:

1) Free services will always insert ads into your newsletter, often right at the very top of each issue. They can be text ads or even annoying animated banner ads, and these promotions will likely be completely unrelated to your e-zine's topic and your readership's interests. As you investigate any free list service, subscribe to a few of its publications and see what type of ads they insert.

2) Lately the privacy policies of services such as Yahoo have come under scrutiny - some of these sites may share and/or sell your subscriber information. Be sure you thoroughly understand these policies before you hand over your list.

3) When you use one of these services, you detract from your brand, because your e-zine will come from that service's domain and not your own. For example, instead of 'Tips from the E-zine Queen' coming from 'ali@ezinequeen.com' it would come from something like 'ezinequeen@yahoogroups.com.' (To some folks this isn't a big deal, but it's worth taking into account.)

Here are two very popular free services:

Topica Exchange

<http://www.topica.com/create/index2.html>

Yahoo Groups

<http://www.yahoogroups.com/>

21 QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY LIST SERVICE BEFORE YOU HIRE THEM

In the interest of keeping today's issue short, I've made this list of 21 questions available by e-mail autoresponder. If you'd like it sent to you right now, just send a blank e-mail to ali-25972@autocontactor.com. You should receive this helpful list in just a few minutes!

NEXT ISSUE: Part 3 of 3, we'll discuss the pros and cons of using *list management software*, and how to choose one.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexandria K. Brown, 'The E-zine Queen,' is author of the award-winning manual, 'Boost Business With Your Own E-zine.' To learn more about her book and sign up for more FREE tips like these, visit her site at <http://www.ezinequeen.com/>

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