

List Host Nightmare!

By Mike Banks Valentine

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

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