A Basic Guide to Listservs

Ewald Consulting

What is a Listserv?

Many of our clients utilize listservs as a means of communication. Listservs allow members to communicate with one another en masse by sending an email to one email address (a reflector), which then distributes to everyone on the list.

Anyone who is a member of a listserv can send emails to and receive emails from the list. Some clients use listservs for all members, SIG members, regions, or for other groups as desired. One client can have many different listservs, each for its own function.

Listservs, Forums, and Distribution Lists

Listservs provide a way for members to communicate with one another from their own personal email. This differs from a forum in that a member must go to the client's website in order to utilize a forum, and that a forum has an easily retrievable and visible record of all posts on a given topic.

Listservs are not the same as distribution lists or email blasts. Distribution lists and email blasts are typically used by running a query in YourMembership to pull a list of emails, and then bulk messaging the emails pulled up in that query. Members of a distribution list cannot email everyone else on the list as they can with a listserv. If one only intends to send out emails, not to allow for members to communicate with one another, one should utilize a distribution list rather than a listserv. In other words, email blasts and distribution lists are one-directional, listservs allow for two-way communication.

Listserv Membership

Listserv membership is determined by a variety of criteria depending on the client and the list itself. Most listservs require members to either opt in or opt out. With very few exceptions, listserv membership is restricted to current members.

Listserv membership is not automatically updated. The listservs must be manually updated, with frequencies ranging from weekly to monthly. Most clients find that their member turnover is not so frequent (or infrequent) as to require a different schedule of updates. Some listservs are only manually updated as needed, such as board member listservs that only change once every year or so. The lists are pulled from queries in YM and updated in DreamHost, and are as accurate as any given member's profile is.

How Can Members Update their Listserv Preferences?

Members may manage their listserv membership by updating their profiles. Listserv membership is based on the information provided in a member profile, and if this information is incorrect, members may be removed from listservs for which they would still like to send and receive messages.

A member can update these preferences by visiting a client's website and logging in to his or her member profile. Once logged in, he or she will be redirected to his or her member preferences page. He or she should select "Manage Profile" under My Profile on the right side of the screen, then "Edit Bio" under Information & Settings in the middle of the screen. He or she will then be able to edit his or her profile. For client-specific information, particularly the fields members will need to ensure are correct, please contact your client's Communication Specialist. Providing correct information for these fields will allow our clients to keep their listserv membership as up to date and accurate as possible.

For More Information

If you are uncertain about whether or not your client utilizes listservs, need information on which listservs are active, are interested in utilizing listservs, or have any other questions about listservs, please contact your client's Communication Specialist.