

# E-lists are for everyone (a primer)

Sometimes known as a 'listserv' [a proprietary name, and a registered trademark, unfortunately], or an 'electronic list', an e-list is an automated electronic mail serving system. The software used to distribute these messages is usually referred to as list-serving software. Common list-serving software packages include 'Listserv', 'Listproc', and 'Majordomo' [there are many others...]. ALIANet uses ListProc, affectionately known by those in the inner circle as 'ListProc the Impaler'.



**Ivan Trundle**

Manager, systems  
and publishing  
ivan.trundle@alia.org.au

People with a common interest often band together to discuss those interests via e-mail, and have their e-mails broadcast to each other through a list server. By joining a given list, a subscriber is then able to (in most cases) send messages to that list and have the list server broadcast them to all other subscribers, who may then respond to the list server and perpetuate the dialogue.

## How do they work?

There are many different lists that one could subscribe to in the world today — some allow the subscriber to post messages through the list, whilst some only allow the subscriber to receive messages (the latter are usually referred to as 'broadcast lists'). Some lists are moderated — with a 'moderator' acting as the go-between to vet messages that can be posted to the list concerned — whilst some are unfettered. All lists by definition have a list-owner, and s/he is generally responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the list. If a collection of lists are housed on a given list server, a list administrator or list manager acts as the overseer of the list server operations, but not necessarily the individual lists.

Some e-lists are private, with a closed and predefined group of subscribers, whilst the majority are 'open' to the public. Some e-lists are configured to maintain archives of files that users may access, either via e-mail or on various web pages. And indeed, some lists allow people to send messages to that list without being a subscriber. However, with mass-marketing and spam on the rise, this is becoming less permissible.

## How do I join an e-list — or unsubscribe?

ALIANet hosts a growing collection of e-lists, and the method for subscribing to an ALIANet list is not dissimilar to that of other list servers. To subscribe to, for example, aliaNEWS (just substitute the name of the list you wish to subscribe to) send the following in the body of a message to [listproc@alia.org.au](mailto:listproc@alia.org.au) [with no subject, no signature]:

```
subscribe aliaNEWS your name
[Your name — for example 'Dirk Thrudger' — is mandatory]
```

To unsubscribe, send an e-mail from your subscribed e-mail account to [listproc@alia.org.au](mailto:listproc@alia.org.au), with the following request:

```
unsubscribe aliaNEWS
```

There is no need to identify your name when unsubscribing, so long as it comes from the account you subscribed with. If your e-mail address has changed, and your subscription was not cancelled prior to the change, just ask the listowner to remove

you from the list, and then resubscribe from your new address.

Note that commands or instructions (subscribing or unsubscribing) should be sent to the list server's address, and that the instruction should almost universally appear in the body of the message, and not in the subject heading. It is important to understand the difference between the list server's e-mail address (which is universal for all lists on a given site) and the list's address (your communications with other subscribers to a given list should be directed to the specific list's e-mail address)

## But I can't subscribe — I keep getting error messages saying something about an unrecognised command...

A few users of Microsoft Outlook Express have had difficulty in subscribing to ALIANet (and other) lists, due to the default (mis)configuration of their e-mail client. The solution is simple, and involves turning off html or MIME formatting in the client preferences. Here's how: In Microsoft Outlook Express, click Tools, Options, Send, and select mail-sending format and then select 'plain text'. If you have already tried to send messages to [listproc@alia.org.au](mailto:listproc@alia.org.au), open your address book, find the entry for [listproc@alia.org.au](mailto:listproc@alia.org.au), select 'properties' with a right mouse click, and select 'Send e-mail using plain text only'.

If you are still having difficulty in subscribing to lists, contact me directly and I will happily take you through the steps required to make your e-mail more compatible with the majority of e-list servers, and with the added bonus of allowing other recipients of your e-mail the benefit of reading your messages as intended.

## Can I make a new e-list to service my group's needs?

Yes. ALIA members are welcome to make a request for the creation of electronic mailing lists to suit their division's needs, or that of a group in the library sector. Browse the ALIANet e-list pages and fill in and submit the electronic request form at <http://www.alia.org.au/e-lists/newlist.request.html>. It takes very little time and effort to set up a new list — if ListProc the Impaler is in a benevolent mood. Please note that the list-owner has certain obligations and duties, one of which is to be an ALIA member whilst acting as the list-owner! But other than that, there is no compulsion for any other subscribers to be ALIA members.

## What e-lists are available on ALIANet?

There are over thirty e-lists available on ALIANet alone, catering for a diverse cross-section of the library sector. Please consult <http://www.alia.org.au/e-lists/alianet.lists.html> for a full and up-to-date listing of what is available to the general public — we also host a number of unrecorded private lists for ALIA committees and other groups. In almost all cases there is no requirement to be an ALIA member to join a list — the lists are provided free-of-charge as a library sector benefit. If you have any queries about the operation or scope of any list, please contact the list-owner directly. ■

*People with a  
common interest  
often band together  
via e-mail, and have  
their e-mails  
broadcast to each  
other through a list  
server...*