

Getting the news?



Ivan Trundle

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

More than two years ago — roughly translated around a decade in internet time — I wrote a primer about electronic discussion lists (e-lists), and in particular focused on ALIANet's collection of e-lists [<http://www.alia.org.au/incite/1999/11/e-lists.html>]. At the time, I gave advice on how to subscribe to e-lists, and a few tips and tricks on the process of joining a list. In case you missed it, check the box alongside for a quick recap.

Last week I sent an e-mail to the almost 6000 subscribers to aliaNEWS, our most-popular e-list and by far and away the most time-consuming to manage. Therefore, it is timely to revisit the article that I wrote in November 1999, and answer one of the most frequent questions that I get asked in relation to ALIANet's e-lists these days: 'Why is it that I am not receiving aliaNEWS, even though I asked to be subscribed when I joined/renewed my membership of ALIA?'

The critical factor in the question above is that the query is almost always posed by people who have *asked to be subscribed* to aliaNEWS, and not those who subscribe themselves. The difference here is to do with authentication of your address. If I were to send a letter through the post, Australia Post uses machines to analyse and sort the letter on the basis of an address, which can take many forms — and if the machine fails, a human sorter can decipher the address almost

100 per cent of the time. If nothing else, the letter will find its way through the system until a more-knowledgeable local postie can associate the person's name with the right address — even if it is patently wrong. I get mail delivered to me all of the time with my house number missing from the address — all because the local postie knows where I live. Even if there was a slight misspelling in my name, it would get to

me. In a previous life, when I was working in Scotland, I had a letter addressed to 'Ivan of Aviemore, Scotland' — and it was delivered to my door with no fuss or bother whatsoever.

Alas, e-mail is far more brutal in interpretation. Either the address is perfectly right, or it is hopelessly and utterly wrong. Consequently, when we post out to the thousands of aliaNEWS subscribers roughly once a month, there are usually more than a handful of 'bounced' addresses. In rare instances, we can work out what the address *should* most likely be, but most of the time we haven't a clue. Part of the problem is that there is no defined standard for e-mail addresses, and whilst it is possible to track down some addresses given enough time, it is a very labour-intensive task.

So if you are wondering why you have not yet received aliaNEWS, and if you have previously supplied your e-mail address via an ALIA membership form, then perhaps this is why nothing has been forthcoming. Please contact ALIA National Office and allow us to correct our record of your e-mail address, and then we can add you to the aliaNEWS subscriber list.

When you join ALIA or renew your membership, the application form asks if you would like to receive aliaNEWS. If you check this box, then your details (name and e-mail address only) are transferred to the aliaNEWS subscriber list. The address that is entered is not verified until the next issue of aliaNEWS is broadcast.

At the time of each broadcast, our mail server works overtime in sending out the message to each of the intended subscribers. In those rare instances when the mail cannot be delivered, the server receives back non-delivery information such as 'domain not found' to 'user not recognised' to warning, cannot deliver for 4 hours' and plenty more. If repeated attempts at delivery are met with these warnings and ultimately non-delivery, then the subscriber is automatically or manually removed from the e-list. A note is passed on to our membership team to remove the member's indicated e-mail address from our membership database until it is next updated. However, in the near future we will implement a scheme whereby we try to trace members with e-mail addresses that are listed as 'not valid' and who wish to receive *inCite*. In the interim, please contact ALIA National Office if you wish to receive aliaNEWS and have yet to do so. aliaNEWS is also archived online [<http://www.alia.org.au/alianews/>]. ■

To subscribe to aliaNEWS send the following in the body of a message to listproc@alia.org.au [no subject, no signature]:

subscribe aliaNEWS <firstname> <lastname>

[insert your name in place of the bracketed text above — without the brackets]

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

unsubscribe aliaNEWS

[There is no need to identify your name when unsubscribing. More information on subscribing and unsubscribing can be found at <http://www.alia.org.au/e-lists/subscribe.html>.]