

# BumpList: Developing Beneficial Email List Structures

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## INTRODUCTION

This poster describes an experimental email list, called BumpList, that imposes constraints on its participants. User interaction is studied and methods are proposed to re-evaluate mailing list conventions to enhance interaction and communication. What new modes of expression can exist by altering the framework of the email list? How can new approaches to the structure of email lists augment and change accepted forms of online discourse?

## APPROACH

Our approach was to design a new form [1] of email list to examine specific aspects of user on-list behaviour. BumpList allowed a maximum of six subscribers. BumpList's main constraint was that when a new person subscribes, the first person to subscribe is "bumped", or unsubscribed from the list. This approach emphasizes the act of subscribing as a focus for involvement.

## USER EXPERIENCE

BumpList consists of a publicly accessible email list and accompanying website which featured a *Hall of Fame* with rankings [2] of user statistics such as total time, total posts, and total number of bumps and re-subscribes.

## PHASES AND USER ACTIVITY

BumpList was run in three phases. A phase represents a period of time in which the BumpList website displayed

specific user information, such as count of emails and subscription activity. The purpose of the phases was to clarify the impact of the limited subscribers rule.

## RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Results were collected from over 1,150 unique subscribers over a four month period. General behaviours observed included subject-header only communication and email chat. Some extreme behaviours ranged from high participation levels to the creation of alternative mailing lists and external statistics sites. Anecdotal observations include positive and negative reactions to the list concept and several abuse or hacks of the system.

Messages sent on BumpList were rated by four criteria including message length, tone, content, and internal references to the list structure itself. This analysis was conducted to understand user's motivations and indicates that conversations shifted from discussing the mailing list's structure to using it as a chat room.

## CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary results show that our alteration of the email list's structure caused users to focus on the act of belonging. The scarcity of available spots and lack of archive also enticed users to remain involved. Further work will involve developing additional rule sets for constructing specific forms of online communities.

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