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Happy Anniversary — JISCmail 3 years on

A very warm welcome to the fourth issue of the JISCmail newsletter, which also coincides, with the third anniversary of the JISCmail service. When I look back I can see a lot of change has taken place during that time, not least in personnel. The service has had three directors, three service managers, two technical managers, two helpline managers and nine support analysts. With just myself, Chris Seelig and Pam Delaney (Helpline Manager) who retires next year in at the start. Every one of those staff has made a valuable contribution to the service and brought with them their particular flair and experience.

I am reminded that those first few weeks of the service in November 2000 were tough but enjoyable at the same time. Tough because any migration where there are seriously large numbers of customers involved is not an easy one and should never be underestimated. Enjoyable because we were seeing the fruits of our labours working and also meeting some of you for the first time. In the years that have followed the team have automated procedures for efficiencies, updated software for ease of use or added new functionality for list owner/members. We have seen new communities come to use JISCmail and are very comforted by the fact that majority of those migrated in November 2000 are still with us today. We are getting very close to hosting 5,000 lists and already have more than half a million subscriptions.

The helpline still take many calls each month and I am still amazed by the wonderful treatment they are afforded by you. You would be surprised by the offers that those in the helpline receive for sorting problems and giving advice!

You will find elsewhere in this newsletter an article written by Pam relaying our experiences from a Helpline perspective. I hope you enjoy the read.

Coming up soon we will have a new facility for your use a 'Survey/Polls' facility and into 2004 a 'Text Chat' facility. More on these in News and the Feb/Mar issue of the Newsletter. The team will also be moving to new helpdesk software. With this you will be able to track your tickets via the web should you wish to do so as well as receiving the normal notifications on submission.

We welcome any suggestions to further improve the service and recommend that you send them to the Helpline (helpline@jiscmail.ac.uk) or forward them via your user groups who will be happy to relay your recommendations. Finally, all of the JISCmail team we would like to thank you and wish you a Happy and Peaceful Christmas and New Year.

Penny Windebank

JISCmail Manager

A Tree for Jed

On Friday 7th November 2003 at 11:30 a gathering of colleagues and friends of Jed Brown (a former JISCmail Director) met outside R71 to attend a tree planting event in his memory. His widow Virginia and daughter Jemima (together with his dog Norbert) were present. Eric Thomas (a friend and work colleague) said a few words about Jed and recalled his 'larger than life' personality, and that the choice of the tree - Sorbus Domestica (True Service Tree) - was somewhat appropriate.



Virginia placed the last spadeful of earth around the tree and a plaque was positioned before photographs were taken. A bench had also been obtained from a Devon craftsman and Norbert decided to sit on the bench before it was put into its position. The event though short and simple was much appreciated and we were blessed by very fine weather. However, the tree is now hoping for a "wet" winter to get itself established.



An Interview with Spencer Warhurst—JISCmail Service Manager

By Philippa Strange

1/ What prompted you to redesign the JISCmail web?

The original JISCmail web (fig 1) was designed primarily to look and feel like Mailbase to aid in the transition between services. After two years of experience running the service we felt it was the right time to move away from historical constraints and create a web that properly represented the features the service offers, while at the same time making the web more usable and intuitive.

2/ What were the main considerations for the new design

Structure and accessibility (see below for site map and accessibility). It was also an opportunity to launch a new logo.

3/ Briefly describe how you set about this project

I started by putting together a very rough version of the site map that you can see on the web

<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/help/web/sitemap.htm>

That is, a lot of initial thought went into establishing a logical and consistent structure to the navigation and content of the site.

The next step was to design the graphics and decide on the basic page layout. All the initial design was done in a graphics application (Paint Shop Pro). The advantage of this is that you can easily reposition elements until you are happy with the overall layout. The logo, header graphics, position and style of navigation were all done this way. From that image, it was then possible to create the first HTML template, decide on font styles and other layout issues. From there it was possible to proceed with content, during which time extensive input and testing was performed by the rest of the JISCmail team.

4/ Tell us a little more about the compliance such as W3C and Bobby

The W3C provide an established set of standards for coding HTML, amongst other things. All the JISCmail web pages are validated to the HTML 4 standard using their online validator (<http://validator.w3.org/>).

Bobby (<http://bobby.watchfire.com/>) is a piece of software that makes checks and recommendations on HTML code based on W3C and US government accessibility guidelines, and is recommended by the 'Digital Media Access Group' based at the University of Dundee.

Compliance in this area is the application of a set of good design practises to help ensure that pages are not obstructive to a wide range of web browsing technologies and configurations.

5/ Were there any major obstacles you had to overcome?

Not especially. The category, A-Z and monthly report pages are generated automatically by scripts. I rewrote them for the new web, which took longer than expected.

6/ How long did the project take?

From start to finish it took about 3 months, but development time within that period was limited by the normal day-to-day work.

7/ What are your thoughts on the new web now it has been live for several months? do you have any plans for further development?

There isn't anything that springs to mind that I wish I had done a different way, which is always a good sign! No further developments are in the pipeline at this stage, but the site is subject to regular maintenance as new content is added and existing content refined.

8/ Are there any pearls of wisdom you could offer to others considering or in the throws of redesigning a website

Basic principles, but I think the main focus on any new web project should be the structure of the content, which is why a rough site map is a useful place to start. Ideally, every page on the site should be accessible with the minimum number of clicks and it should always be obvious where you are in the web and how to get back to the homepage and other sections.

The homepage is probably the most important page, since it is the main entry point for the site and a focal point for navigation. However, try to avoid the temptation of cramming too much onto it. Big homepages with reams of text, long lists of links or too many images can be very confusing and discouraging.



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Figure 1. The old, original, transitional website.

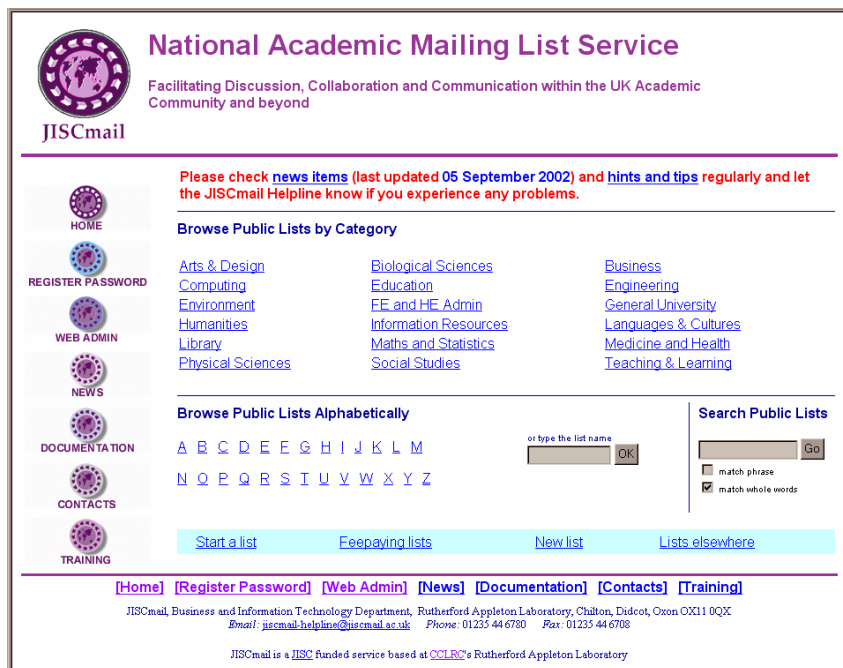
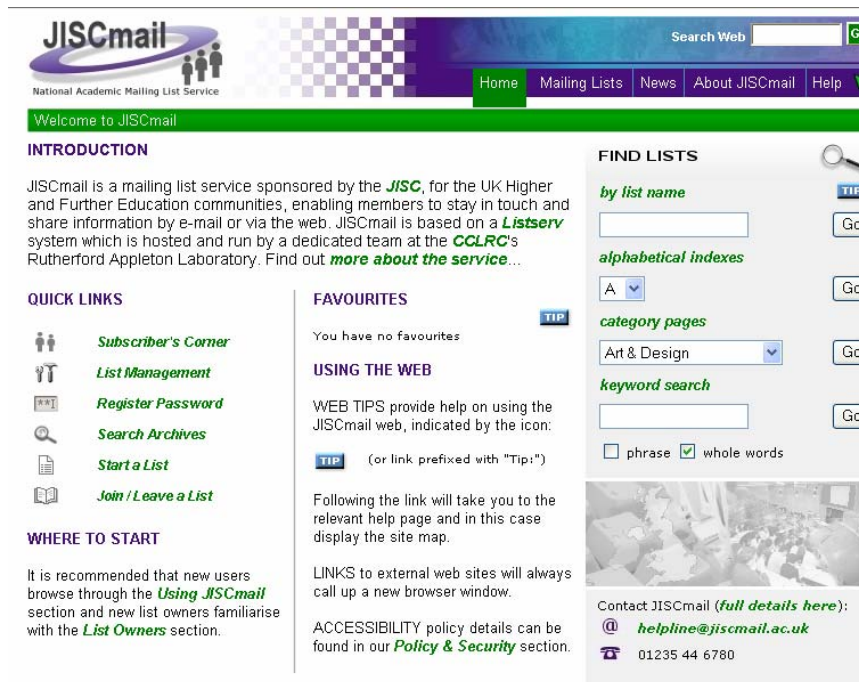


Figure 2. The new, improved website.



CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR SERVICE - 05/12/2003

The JISCmail team would like to wish all those using the service a very Merry Christmas and peaceful New Year.

The team will be taking a break from Thursday 25 December to Friday 2 January 2004 inclusive. During this period JISCmail staff will be on emergency cover only and Operations staff will perform their normal walkabout to check machines remain operational.

Please continue to report any problems via the [Helpline](#) as these will be picked up and dealt with as soon as possible.

The JISCmail Team



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JISC Resource Guides and the JISCmail service



by Emma Beer, Resource Guide Adviser for Arts and Humanities, www.jisc.ac.uk/resourceguides

JISC Resource Guides provide an overview of quality-assured information about electronic resources and support services, selected by subject specialists. Each Guide contains resources and services designed specifically to support learning and teaching and research at all levels of higher education.



The JISC Resource Guides exist in web and print form, are updated every six months and publicised via a programme of outreach activities by Resource Guide Advisers across seven subject areas. We are all based, or work with, our relevant Resource Discovery Network hubs at Higher Education institutions around the UK.

Academics, librarians and students find the Guides aid in learning, teaching and research in a whole spectrum of ways - academics are impressed with the breadth and range of resources and their time-saving possibilities, librarians appreciate the convenience of having a freely available updated Guide at their fingertips, and students find the Guides an excellent fast-track to resources that will help them with a range of tasks - from finding the meaning of a word, to in-depth primary research at their desktop.

On a recent trip to the University of Central Lancashire, one academic likened initiation to the world of resources to visiting a library for the first time - it takes a day or so to wander around, but once you find your feet, the opportunities it offers are limitless. It seems that this view is spreading within the HE community, once you've tapped the wealth of material available to you, there's no turning back!



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How JISCmail helps

Aside from our individual mailing lists, we are entirely dependent on JISCmail to keep ourselves up to date with our collaborative partners, to keep interested members of the community up to date with our developments, to notify various groups via their mailing lists of workshops that we are running and to find out about conferences and events. Moreover, the nature of our distributed team and management means that most of our communication must occur via email. Internal JISCmail lists facilitate this communication, and makes distributed work viable. In short, our work would be impossible, and our successes unimaginable without the support of JISCmail. Many happy returns!

Achievements in the past year include:

A roll-out to a further five subject areas. Guides are now available on the web and in printed form across:

Arts and Humanities
Engineering, Mathematics and Computing
Geography and the Environment
Health and Life Sciences
Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
Physical Sciences
Social Sciences

Distribution of more than 150,000 printed Guides 2002-3.

A nationwide programme of workshops delivered in all subject areas, including Arts and Humanities Online, Social Science Online and other collaborative events.



JISC Resource Guides

(continued)



Unprecedented ordering from our online web form (<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/resorder.html>) - 100 000 Guides were ordered within 32 days of their availability. The demand for Guides has been so high that almost all have had to go to a reprint within a month of our first print run for this academic year.

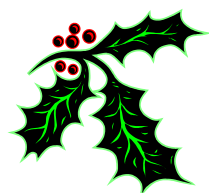
The JISC Resource Guide initiative has been short-listed for the Best Team in an Academic Environment award at the International Information Industry Awards, part of December's Online Information 2003 events.

Uncertainty for the future

Despite all these successes, beyond July 2004 funding for the initiative is uncertain. If you would like to support the Resource Guide initiative and ensure that we can continue to serve the Higher Education community, please email me at the address below with your thoughts about how the Resource Guides helps you in your learning, teaching and research.

How you can keep up to date

Each Resource Guide Adviser has their own announcement list, and as well as Resource Guide Announce super lists. To keep up to date with the initiative, please sign up to our JISCmail announcements lists:



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Resource Guide superlist

rg-all-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Arts and Humanities

rg-artshum-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Engineering, Mathematics and Computing

rg-emc-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Geography and the Environment

rg-geoenv-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Health and Life Sciences

rg-hls-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

rg-hlst-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Physical Sciences

rg-physci-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resource Guide for Social Sciences

rg-socsci-announce@jiscmail.ac.uk

Emma Beer

emma.beer@ahds.ac.uk

Resource Guide Adviser for Arts and Humanities

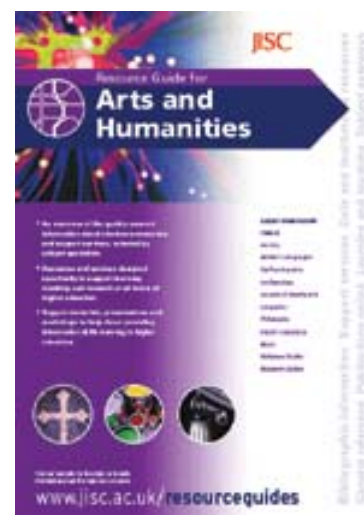
Arts and Humanities Data Service

King's College London

75-79 York Road

London SE1 7AW

www.jisc.ac.uk/resourceguides/artshum



JISCmail Helpline through the ages by Pam Delaney

The time was 08.45, the date 27 November 2000 and there was a feeling of real expectancy in the air. Was a new satellite being launched? No, JISCmail was about to go live and the Helpline was manned.

There had been a build up over the previous 4 months as preparations were made to take over the National Academic Mailing List service from the previous hosts and the mass of data for all the current lists and their archives had been transferred from Mailbase to JISCmail at 17.00 on Friday 24 November. Over the weekend the technical team worked flat out to be ready to go live on Monday morning at 09.00.

09.15, 09.30, 09.45, the system is running but nothing so far has been received at the Helpline. At approximately 10.00 the first query arrived. It was a command to Mailbase which had been re-directed to JISCmail, someone was trying to subscribe to a list. Queries then started to trickle in over the rest of the morning and early afternoon, by which time we realised that for all the publicity that had been distributed by ourselves and on the Mailbase homepage, we had not reached as many people as we had hoped, with the result that the majority of list members and owners were still sending commands and postings to Mailbase instead of JISCmail.

After 24 hours the speed that queries were arriving was greater than the amount of time it takes to answer one and return the result to the sender, so a small backlog started to appear. We were well aware of our SLA and determined to meet it. As we were one member of staff down on maternity leave, this did stretch our resources, so many long hours were put in by the remaining staff to make sure we delivered. Needless to say, I think by the Xmas break, we were all ready for a nice long sleep.

By February, the input to and output from the Helpline, although always busy, was most of the time balanced and we were also able to create new lists within 24 -36 hours of submission. By the summer the time to create a list was much shortened, queries were answered the same day as received, less mail was being directed from Mailbase and the Helpline staff could devote some time into helping with system enhancements and training.

In July 2002, the latest release 1.8e, of the Listserv software was installed and we felt the impact on the Helpline of November 2000 all over again and had a very busy month.

The new release, although a big improvement on 1.8d with many enhancements, did cause a vast increase in the number of queries we were receiving. There was an entirely new list management page and although all the same features as the old version were there, plus many extras, it was very different and many members were not sure of the change. Some also did not like the layout and colour, so work was undertaken immediately to improve this. As members became used to the new release and a new colour scheme was introduced, which suited the majority, the number of queries to the helpline again went down.

Over the next few months, Spencer our new technical expert automated many of our procedures. The main time saving one for the Helpline staff being the create list script which enables us to produce lists within a few hours of submission.

Earlier this year a new JISCmail web page was released. The design offered a completely fresh approach, with emphasis on ease of use. The content of the documentation, in particular, had been overhauled for clarity, providing a logical and concise breakdown of key areas of the JISCmail service from both a general user and list owner point of view. The new web was received very well and judging by the number of queries received at the present time, is able to help members and owners find the answer to many queries themselves

The downside of 2003 has been the vast increase in the amount of 'spam' received. Our lists are protected in all but a tiny minority by allowing postings from list members only. We have contacted all our list owners who still have the old default of Send= Public setting and the response although not 100% has been very good. The Helpline has to remain open to the public and therefore open to 'spam', so although we receive approximately 1000 queries every month, about 40-50% have to be checked then discarded as 'spam'.

During all this time, the amount of phone queries has remained fairly steady with a slight increase from approximately 50 per month to 60. Some of our members like to be talked through a problem rather than just receive an email with instructions.

The number of JISCmail lists has increased from 3114 to 4746 (the 3114 figure includes 300 plus lists that were deleted after a housekeeping exercise at the end of 2002).



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Tips for list owners by Pam Delaney

Who can post to a list?

The ability to post to a list is controlled by the access control keyword `Send=`, found in the list header configuration. Below is a brief explanation of the `Send` settings to be found in our lists.

Send= Public

The most open access is to allow anyone from the public to post to a list whether a member of the list or not. This only applies to a very small minority of our lists now, as the public setting does allow 'spam' to get through to the list.

Send=Private

This is the most common and safest setting within our lists and is our default. It only allows list members to post to the list. Most would be 'spammers' are deterred by having to join a list before posting to it.

Send= Editor, Hold

This is the setting needed if the list is an edited/moderated list and needs to be accompanied by the line

Editor = someone@somewhere

Or the lines

Editor = someone@somewhere

Moderator= All,

Moderator = someone@somewhere

Moderator= someone-else@somewhere

N.B. This setting will allow the public to post to the editor/moderator and it is their choice to allow the posting to be passed on to the list or to reject it.

Send= Owner(s)

This setting is usually used in announcement only lists and in super lists where the owner(s) wishes to have total control over the postings

Send= someone@somewhere

This setting is sometimes used by an owner who prefers to post from a designated email address, rather than a more personal one i.e.

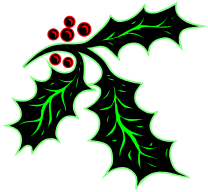
Owner= john.doe@somewhere

Send= admin@somewhere

It can also be used in the context where A owns the list but would rather have B post to it for him/her

Send= Private, (LISTNAME)

This setting allows members of the list and also members of the list named LISTNAME to post. This is sometimes used in a superlist to allow members of the sublist to post to both the sublist and superlist



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GUIDELINES ON ETIQUETTE

Sending messages to JISCmail lists is generally a matter of common sense and courtesy, and users should be able to use their own sense of what is appropriate to guide their behaviour. Please try to consider the following when posting:

- Respect copyright when forwarding messages, if in doubt check with the author
- Respect people's privacy, don't give out the private email addresses or contact details of others
- Think before cross-posting, some people belong to more than one list
- Don't call someone names or be overtly rude, blatantly sarcastic or condescending
- Watch where that reply is going, should it go to the sender or the list?
- Send your commands to the right address, jiscmail@jiscmail.ac.uk
- Make sure your email address is correct
- Complain to the list owner, not the list
- Suspend mail when going away, you can always catch up via the archives
- Don't send attachments to JISCmail lists, use the files area associated with your list
- Use a meaningful subject line, it will increase the chances of it being read and found
- Write relevant messages appropriate to the purpose of the list
- Don't quote an entire message when replying this leads to very long messages
- Keep your lines short and don't send long messages, waffle is off-putting
- Use a short, well-designed signature
- Only use ASCII (plain) text ie don't use pound (£) signs



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| A selection of JISCmail statistics for | October | November |
|--|------------|-----------|
| distributed messages | 10,982,818 | 9,665,270 |
| new lists set up | 102 | 80 |
| new subscriptions | 5579 | 4837 |
| unique subscribers | 346,508 | 350,933 |
| active lists | 4689 | 4746 |
| spams detected | 48672 | 58337 |
| viruses received | 2567 | 1190 |
| viruses distributed | 0 | 0 |
| helpdesk phone queries | 60 | 51 |
| helpdesk email queries | 473 | 381 |

Our contact details are :

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Chilton
Didcot
Oxfordshire
OX11 0QX
Tel 01235 44 6780
Fax 01235 44 6708

Suggestions and ideas for publication in this newsletter are welcome, please email to:

newsletter-request@jiscmail.ac.uk

The closing date for the next issue is 30th January

Philippa Strange, Editor

