Weekly Mailing System

Within VS-TrEx 1.3.8 series of traffic exchange software

Overview: Why send a newsletter?

General: One of your responsibilities as a webmaster is to send out a 'statistical newsletter' each week. This process does a couple things:

1. For people with referrals, it gives them their Downline surfing bonus
2. For sites that give bonus credits for the top 25 surfers, this calculates and pays those surfers
3. This updates the "Top-25 surfers this week", and "Top-25 all time surfers" lists
4. It also provides a vehicle where you can advertise, or sell advertising space
5. It reminds readers they are part of your site, which can sometimes remind them to become more active.

The number 1 suggestion on newsletters is to do it on the same day every week.

Some people who know me will snicker at that, because I have often sent out newsletters late. I pay for that, because when consistency drops off, so does readership. Don't make my mistake: pick a day and stick to that day.

Remember that newsletters are text, not HTML

We've had several webmasters trip over this… since the preview is displayed on a web page, it "looks like" html will work in a newsletter. Sorry, but 1.3.any version of VS-TrEx only generates text newsletters. That's one less thing for spam/bulk filters to complain about. [We will be adding an html option in a later 1.4.something version.]

Before getting into the details, some notes about configurations:

The newsletter depends on a series on configurations to do what it does. It needs information on #/levels of referral, Downline surfing percentage, and Top-25 surf bonus.

- Levels of referral are configured in 2 places:
    - o Core Controls/Appearance/Member Pages/Member Levels – each record here has a "Referral Levels" field, which shows how many levels (Level 1 is direct referral) are qualified for surf bonuses.
    - o Individual member records can override this value. If you want to make sure all members are using the same values, click on the link near the top of Core Controls/Appearance/Member Pages/Member Levels. This will force all users to have the appropriate values in their local record. [see image on next page]
- Percentage of surfing given to member:
    - o In the same place as mentioned above, there is a 'bonus' field on the referrals line. This number is a percentage, expressed as decimal. So 0.03 is 3% of surfing by all Downline members
- Bonus based on top-25 surfing:
    - o In trexvars.php, there is the following line (by default):
    - o $RiderBonus = 1;   // this gives 10% of surfing to top-25 surfers when list is built
    - o Setting this to zero blocks the high-volume surfer bonus
- Email footer: This allows you to configure what shows up at the bottom of the email.

Working on member level information for referral levels and percentages:

See the link that says "apply them to all current users: **here**"? That is how you force the values in this table into the members' private settings. Normally, you only need to run this link if you change entries in this table.

To manage values for a specific level, click on the Lv. # (Level Number). For instance, clicking on the "0" produces:

For purposes of the mailings, the two fields that are critical are the first two columns of the "Referrals" row.

- "Levels" is how many levels of referrals are permitted (1 being direct-referrals only).
- "Bonus" is the percentage of surfing given to the member for Downline members' surfing each week. So in this case, a Passenger Level gets 3% of all surfing up to 5 levels down.

Important note: If you wish to use Pay Pal as a payment processor, you should note that they no longer permit merchants to provide referrals more than one level deep. If you violate this, Pay Pal can suspend your Pay Pal account. So either set all levels to 1 referral level, or plan to not use Pay Pal as a payment processor.

Okay, that was a bit of a convoluted side-trip, but hopefully it will help you understand how the newsletter generator works out the figures it sends to the end-users.

Managing the footer at the bottom of outgoing emails

The email footer is configurable through core controls/appearance/members area/Email Footer:

Simply put the text you want into the box, and click 'write text file' at the bottom. The page will redisplay with the new text. Note: bracket codes will NOT work in the footer… everything needs to be spelled out.

On to the details of the weekly newsletter run.

Go to core controls/activities/weekly mailing:

This page was laid out to run in order: Top to bottom. Click the first link (Prepare weekly top surfers list with bonuses):

Note the dates will auto-generate as 'yesterday' through 'a week ago'. If you do the newsletter on the same day each week, you won't have to do any calendar math. If you need to 'test', or just want to look at values without saving, click the 'test' checkbox. Either way, click the Generate TopList 1 button.

To keep things simpler, instead of clicking on the 'return' link at the bottom, re-click on the weekly mailing menu item, and proceed to the second link "Update all-time top surfers list"

Again, you have the test option. Click on the generate button

Click on the 'weekly mailing' menu item, and then click the "update total referral counts" link.

Important: If you are running on non-standard dates (such as running the newsletter a day late) you must MAKE ABSOLUTELY SURE that the start and end date here, match EXACTLY the start and end date you will use for statistics. If the dates don't match, referral counts will be zero, and no bonuses will be given.

Click on the 'Build Referral Table" button.

This list often takes a few seconds (3-10) to create if you have a decent user base (over 2,000 member entries). When the page displays, the list is complete.

Back to Weekly Mailing menu link again. The data is all built, and it's time to create your newsletter.

Here is a very basic newsletter layout you can use as a starting point for your own newsletter.

Because this is a statistic newsletter, the top checkbox ("Include Member Statistics") is checked.

Because this is a statistics newsletter, we've selected Users by Status + With Activity. [See notes 2 pages down for more on this set of fields… they are slightly tricky until you understand them.]

The Subject goes in the email's subject line.

The message body contains literal text, and "bracket codes". Bracket codes let you enter a left-square bracket and a few characters, which tell the software to insert specialized text, like the user's name, for example. The little table of "Reminders" to the right will tell you what each bracket code is, and what it does.

For your own safety, always end your messages with [%F (bracket code F)… this puts in an anti-spam footer, identifying your site as the sender. The statistics are generated as part of the footer, so you MUST use [%F on statistic emails.

Note that the button at the bottom says 'preview email'… this gives you a chance to proof and edit your email before it goes out.

Scroll to the bottom of this page:

If the layout looks good, Un-check that bottom checkbox, and click Edit/Send. Alternatively, edit what's in the message field, and leave that bottom checkbox checked to view the output again.

Once you hit Edit/Send with the last checkbox UN checked, your system will delay as it generates the messages. Generally, if you have less than 1,000 recipients, this will run in under 15-20 seconds, and the last page will draw (which lists all the users the message was sent to).

As your site grows past about 1,000 active users, this page will appear to time out. Do not be concerned: The messages will all go out: The time out is because your browser got tired of waiting for the page to redraw.

Discussing the member selection block:

Most webmasters have tripped up on this one. Improper selections will lead to messages such as:

```
Query failed: You have an error in your SQL syntax. Check the manual that corresponds to your MySQL server version for the right
syntax to use near 'ORDER BY UserID' at line 1
Query was: SELECT * FROM Users WHERE ORDER BY UserID

Warning: mysql_fetch_array(): supplied argument is not a valid MySQL result resource in
/home/varis/public_html/trex/Control/Activity/Message.php on line 538
```
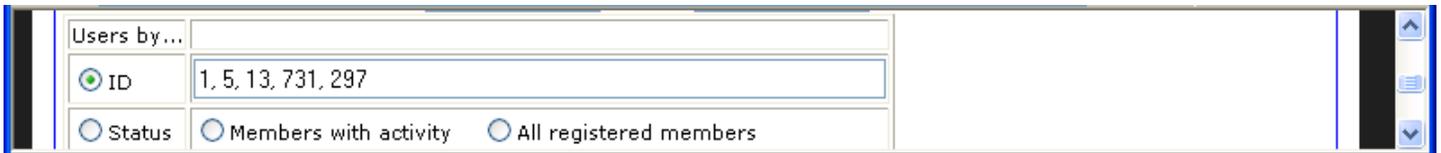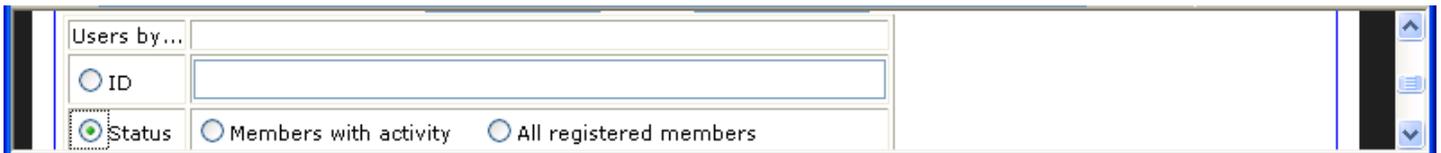
Examples of mistakes:
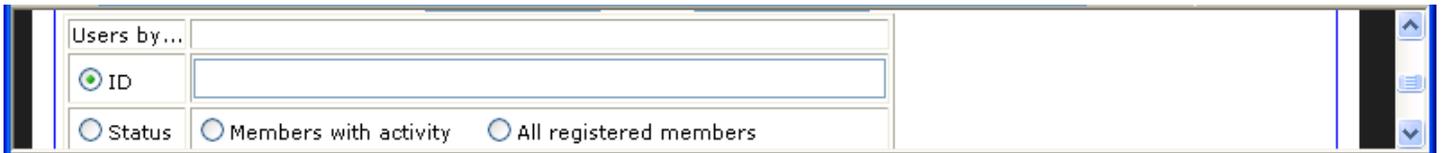
Problem: Users By ID was selected, but no IDs were provided. **Solution**: put 1 or more user IDs in, separated by commas, as shown below:

Next mistake

Problem: Users by Status was selected, but not status was selected. **Solution:** select either 'members with activity' or 'all registered members', and this is then sendable.

Once you have the "Users By" selections set correctly, your mail system should work fine. Remember:

There are always 2 things to select, to determine who receives a mailing:
1. The left column indicates by ID or by Status
2. The right column must provide more info, based on which row in the left column was selected

End of Weekly Mailings documentation.