

It's a doozy!



[Gmail Invite Spooler Post-Mortem](#)

23 Mar



Nine months after closing down the [Gmail Invite Spooler](#), the page remains one of the most popular landing pages on my site. Over the past several months, this page has averaged around 2,500 unique visitors a day. I'll explain the arc of this wonderful service, but first I'd like to make one thing very clear.

Sorry, I do not have any Gmail invites. Please don't ask me for Gmail invites. I am truly sorry that I cannot provide you with any. Please go to [Google Mail](#) for more information on how you may get your own account.

You may obtain an account without an invite these days. [All you need is a cell phone.](#)

Background

In 2004, Gmail was a very hot commodity. Since April 1st of that year, people were clamoring to get in on the exclusive beta of pre-IPO Google's hottest new offering. In late summer, by the time I decided to write the spooler, Gmail invites were no longer [selling for \\$100 or more on eBay](#), but there was a large amount of clutter on the internet with people asking for or offering invites.

The forums and blogs that I visited were littered with chatter about trading invites, but the givers and seekers didn't seem to be coming together efficiently. It wasn't uncommon to see multiple posts back to back asking for and offering invites.

My wife may not always like it, but when I see a problem, my mind immediately gets to work on a solution. This was one problem that I knew I could make a simple fix for in a matter of hours.

The First Incarnation

Throughout its lifetime, the basic workings of the page remained the same: People with gmail invites would send them to a specific email address. The spooler would then read those emails and

store the invites in a database. Site visitors could come and claim available invites on a first-come, first-served basis. There was no backordering of invite requests. When demand exceeded supply, one had to wait until someone else donated some.

Originally the spooler was made solely for the use of the people on the forums I noticed suffered most from inefficient offers and requests. It was a very simple system that was only workable on a small scale, but I assumed it would only ever see a few hundred hits.

On the first day that I had the spooler open, I received 2,592 Gmail invites. The second day saw 4,574 more coming in. By the end of the second day, I had over 3,000 unclaimed invites.

It didn't take long for word of the "magical free Gmail site" to leak out to the general internet. Within a few days, demand exceeded supply and I had to implement controls on the page to prevent people from refreshing constantly while waiting for a new invite to come in. I also got the first of many lessons in writing code with scaling in mind as I divorced the mailbox checking from page loading.

Ups and Downs

After a month of running the service, the average inbound invites per day dropped below 1,000 for the first time. It seemed that most of the people who had extra invites on hand had heard about the service and donated all they were willing; Google was not giving out new invites on a regular basis at that time. The inbound invites continued to decline through most of December 2004 until they hit a low around 50.

All this time, demand for invites remained as many as 100,000 visitors and over a million hits per day. On December 20th, the drought was over as Google started to give Gmail users about five fresh invites each day. The average day saw around 2,500 new invites, but they were still being snapped up as soon as they came in. I implemented more restraints to prevent abuse and further streamlined my code in order to keep my server load at a reasonable level. During this time, my web statistics began to break down because Webalizer couldn't process all of the data without choking.

Way, Way Up

On February 2nd, 2005, Google decided to open the flood gates. They began giving out around 100 new invites per day to Gmail users. My service experienced demand increases like I'd never seen before. For the first time, I was forced to benchmark my code and decide which methods to use based on how many milliseconds they took.

For only the second time, supply was greater than demand. Anyone wanting a Gmail invite could get one through my service without any delay. Unique visitors increased, but hits dropped way down since users had no need to refresh frequently to see if new invites had arrived.

Way, Way Down

Monday June 6th, 2005 was the day I received an email from Stephanie Hannon, Gmail's Product Manager. Later that day, I had a conference call with Stephanie and her superior regarding my service. They felt that services like mine had become a threat to the quality of Gmail. Their reasons for making the service invite-only were many: _____

- Limit new subscribers
- Heighten demand and curiosity
- Limit accessibility of accounts to potential abusers

The last reason was the one that made them care about my site. Spammers and abusers have a higher threshold of entry without the spooler. Despite the fact that I think Google should do more on their part to prevent automated account creation and duplication, they do have more random people gaining access to invites through a service like mine.

In short, Google felt as if too many spammers and abusers were getting invites that they obtained from me and saw this as a threat.

Why I Pulled the Plug

I've received a few thousand emails asking for invites, complaining about how "unfair" this is, or asking for source code. In the early days after pulling the plug, I would respond to every request with an individually written response explaining the situation. This generated many replies suggesting I just re-open the system in defiance.

Aside from the fact that I really don't wish to burn any bridges with Google (heck, maybe they'd forget all this and hire me if I ever applied), I have good technical reasons for not re-opening the spooler: My service relied on people with Gmail accounts constantly inviting the now blocked email address `gmail@isnoop.net`.

Google is no dummy. They know full well that they must track the email addresses that the invites are sent to. They can (and did) auto[redacted] invite sent to my site. All 1,240,162 invites I had left over the day I shut the service down instantly became duds. To continue the service, I would have to change the method of catching new invites to one substantially more inconvenient for the donor.

In the end, insistence on keeping the spooler open would have certainly summoned the massive lawyering machine deep within the "don't be evil" company and I don't think reasonable person wants that fight.

Fast Forward to Today

The former Gmail Invite Spooler page is now a brief testament to what was once the most popular Gmail invite spooler on the internet.

The bulk of the current 2,500 visitors per day come from non-English speaking blog sites that haven't yet gotten the message that the page is closed. While the rest of isnoop.net has a 66% US visitor rate, the spooler is only 17% US traffic; it holds the #1 slot by less than one percent.

Almost all of the dozens of emails and stray blog posts requesting invites ask the same thing (in broken English). I saw the need for folks who didn't speak my native language to get the full story, so [I wrote a simple script to help them out](#). This has helped reduce the confused request flow, but it has also crimped the last of [my dwindling AdSense revenue](#). Oh well. I ran this site before it ever brought me a penny and I'll continue to do so for as long as I have the energy.

I turn down all requests for the source code for the spooler. If Google doesn't want me starting fires

in their back yard, I'm certainly not going to give away my matches to all of the other neighborhood kids.

I have considered revamping the spooler for use with other invite-only services, but I've yet to see one of great enough popularity and of proper nature to justify the effort. I refuse to open up such a thing for a community-based website on the principal that it breaks the "six-degrees" network they're trying to build up by bringing in random people with no association to the inviter.

Media Coverage

Aside from a number of blogs and forums that mentioned the service, these are the print media references I am aware of:

Book: *Google Search & Rescue for Dummies* – 2005

[Text](#)

Book: *Google Hacks* – 2005

[Text](#)

Popular Science Magazine – June 2005

[Close-up](#)

[Full page](#)

The Mercury News (San Jose) – May 23, 2005

[Online version](#)

PC World – April 13, 2005

[Online version](#)

Sydney Morning Herald – April 9, 2005

[Close-up](#)

[Full page](#)

[Online version](#)

Are you seriously still reading this?

This post covers almost all of the points I regularly discuss with folks who have questions about the service. I hope this overly long post has satisfied your curiosity.

Comments [18 Comments](#)

Categories [Google](#), [Made by isnoop](#), [PHP](#), [Site Features](#)

18 Responses to “Gmail Invite Spooler Post-Mortem”



cristian May 31, 2006 at 4:24 pm <#>

quiero una invitacion



. [2iyw1l](#) June 5, 2006 at 12:33 am <#>

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. [Le Nam](#) July 14, 2006 at 3:14 am <#>

Dear Sir,

Can you invite me, please.

Thanks a lot



. [Chris Harris](#) August 14, 2006 at 6:50 pm <#>

This is a great example of an opportunity that many had missed – because they viewed it as a limitation – not an opportunity to innovate! Well done.



. [name](#) August 15, 2006 at 6:14 pm <#>

Please post the links to gmail invite sources.



. [pippo](#) September 5, 2006 at 2

can i get an invitation?



. [ben](#) October 23, 2006 at 10:47 pm <#>

could i please have an invite? email bebeb@hotmail.com

thank you



. [huy](#) November 21, 2006 at 4:12 am <#>

please invite me, thanks.

. [jason](#) December 11, 2006 at 6:19 pm <#>

PLEASE DONT CLICK MY ADS

wink..

and if u want an invite, jasonbirring@gmail.com is my email i have over 90 invites



. [jason](#) December 11, 2006 at 6:19 pm <#>

<http://jasonbirring.blogspot.com>

thatsmy site, there are ads..*nudge*

FIGHT THE POWER



. fsfifre December 23, 2006 at 9:13 am <#>

Hi all!!! Cool site!!!



. gsnncmuthv July 6, 2007 at 10:57 am <#>

Hello! Good Site! Thanks you! iuvpslbfhiysy



. betting on baseball October 30, 2007 at 11:05 am <#>

Thank you. You have helped someone more than you could know.



. Jane March 14, 2008 at 11:22 pm <#>

Trackbacks/Pingbacks

. [Matthias Klaes - Research, Reviews, Current Projects](#) - May 16, 2006

GMail Spooler Case Study

Thanks to isnoop we now have, in its raw outlines, a fascinating case study of the stellar rise and sudden demise of the fir...

. Anonymous - October 25, 2006

You have a really nice site! Love it!

. [History of Gmail | songs25.com](#) - September 2, 2011

[...] ^ "Gmail Invite Spooler Post-Mortem". [...]

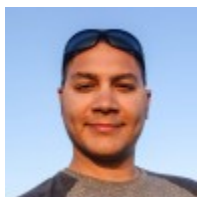
. [Why gmail@isnoop.net is your recovery email address « isnoop.net blog](#) - February 5, 2013

[...] after the spooler shut down, the system emails started pouring in. The account [gmail@isnoop.net](#) had never been an address I [...]

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