A LOW-COST MARKETING SYSTEM USING YOUR MODEM

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A LOW-COST MARKETING SYSTEM USING YOUR MODEM

The computer is now viewed as the most essential business tool available.
The only problem is, many businesses buy a computer just for the sake of
having one, with no plans as to how the computer will be used. Sure,
they start to type letters on it, maybe a few marketing documents, and
the customer list goes on it, but that's the extent of computer use for
many businesses. Some don't even get that far. Well, those businesses
are missing out on a valuable low-cost marketing opportunity open ONLY
to computer users. To take advantage of this opportunity, you need to
have a MODEM. First, I'll tell you what a modem is, and an overview of
how to use it. Then, I'll let you in on some valuable marketing secrets.

WHAT IS A MODEM?
The word stands for MOdulator DEModulator, and it's just a fancy name
for a telephone hookup for your computer. Modems can either be a card
that is easily installed into your computer, or it can be an external unit.
Basically, the only difference from modem to modem that the average user
needs to worry about is the speed. Modem speed is indicated by a BAUD rate,
which indicates how many "data bits" are transferred per second.
The most common baud rates for modems are 300, 1200, 2400, 4800, 9600,
and 14,400. Don't get a 300 or 1200 baud modem, as they are outdated and
too slow. A 2400 baud modem is sufficient for most people and is very
economical (usually $50 or so).

With a modem and a special computer program called a terminal program
(one is usually included with the modem), you can call up other computers
and communicate with them, including transferring programs and files.
You can communicate with individual computer users, or through BULLETIN
BOARD SYSTEMS, or BBS's, which are services run primarily by private
individuals.

When you call a BBS, you are instructed to type your name and a password
of your choice. If it's your first time calling the BBS, you will usually
go through a short registration process, similar to filling out a form.
This is all done on your computer. The information you type on your end
is sent through the phone line to the system operator's, or SYSOP's,
computer, which is running the BBS. Once you are registered, there may or
may not be a membership fee, depending on the individual SYSOP, though
most will allow free use of their BBS by non-members for a short period of
time each day. This will be all the time you'll need, though, to use the
methods I'll describe in this report. There are also large ON-LINE
(accessible by modem) services you can call, such as Compu-Serve, Genie,
America On-Line, and others. These are basically the same as BBS's,
but on a much larger scale, and all have monthly membership fees, with
most charging by the hour.

WHY SHOULD I CALL A BBS?
That's an easy question to answer. The two main features of the average
BBS are FILES and MESSAGES. Files are computer programs that you can DOWNLOAD (or
transfer) to your computer. Here's a simplified explanation
of how you do it: First, you select the file you want from a list on the BBS. Then, you tell the BBS
to send the file to you.
 The file is sent through the phone line to your computer. Then, after you LOG OFF (leave) the
BBS, you can use the program jus
t like any other computer program.

This process can also work in reverse. You can send a program you have
written or acquired to the BBS, so other users can download it and use it.
This is called UPLOADING a file.

Keep in mind that copyrighted programs, like the ones you buy in a store,
CAN NOT be uploaded to a BBS. This violates copyright laws.
The programs you find on a BBS will be either public domain (anyone can copy
them and distribute them), or shareware (free for you to copy and try out,
but there is a registration fee if you use the program regularly).
Also, if you find a BBS that has commercial, copyrighted programs available
for downloading, DON'T CALL IT AGAIN! You can get in BIG trouble if you mess
around with copyrighted programs, including fines, jail terms, and
confiscation of your computer. You won't need to worry about this, though,
if you stick to legitimate BBS's.

WHAT OTHER BENEFITS CAN I GET FROM A BBS?
The other function of a BBS is messages. On almost any BBS, you can leave
a message, either to a specific user of the BBS, or to everyone.
You tell the BBS who the message is for, a short description of what the
message is about, and then type the message, or upload a previously typed
message. Then, when the person you've left the message for accesses the BBS,
he or she will see a note on their screen telling them they have mail.
Or, if you left the message for everyone, anyone who enters the message area
of the BBS can read the note you left.

Many BBS's participate in NETWORKS, which allow you to leave messages for
people who don't call that particular BBS, but call another BBS that is a
member of the same network. There are many different networks, some
dedicated to special interests or hobbies, others more general.
Here's how they work: You leave a message to either a specific person who
can access the network on a BBS they call, or the message can be for everyone. The SYSOP of the
BBS you call then collects all
the messages in that particular network and transfers them by modem to the network headquarters,
which could be in an entirely d

ifferent state. At the same time, the SYSOP receives a packet of new messages from the network headquarters, these having come
from the other member BBS's. This distribution method means you can leave a message on your local BBS to, for example, your fri
end in Hawaii, who calls a BBS that belongs to the same network. In a few days, your friend will see a "mail waiting" note when
 he or she accesses the BBS. Many times, this will happen faster than if you sent a letter through the mail!

Hopefully, this will give you a basic understanding of what BBS can do for you. The programs alone will be exciting enough for anyone who hasn't been exposed to this before. For example, the BBS I frequent, Radio Daze, has over 65,000 programs that can be downloaded! But what about the marketing secrets I promised earlier?

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES
VIA BBS

The networks are the key to effective marketing with your modem.
Remember that I said you can leave a message that everyone can read.
Why can't this message be an ad? Ah ha! I have used network ads extensively
to publicize my newsletter, Small & Home Business Journal, and it has been
very successful. I'll use my marketing methods as an example.

One of the advantages of the way Small & Home Business Journal is published
(on disk, instead of printed) is that, for all intents and purposes, it is a
computer program. I made the first issue a sample issue that is copyright
free. I then uploaded the sample issue to Radio Daze BBS, as well as
CompuServe, one of the huge national on-line services mentioned earlier.
Thus, people could download the sample issue into their computer and use it,
the same as if I handed them a copy on a disk. This vastly reduced my
marketing expenses, as I could get a sample issue to someone without the
expense of the disk and mailing.

Here's where the crafty part is. I then composed an ad on my word processor
explaining the benefits of reading SHBJ. At the end of the ad, I noted that
there are two ways the reader could get a sample issue. Either they could
send two first-class stamps to me, and I would send a sample on disk, or they
could download a sample by calling Radio Daze BBS or CompuServe. I saved
this ad as a text file, then called up Radio Daze, which participates in a
number of networks. I went into either the small business area or the
classified ad area of each network (networks are usually composed of a
number of message areas, making targeting easy) and uploaded the previously
typed ad as a message readable by all. For the message description, I tried
a number of different descriptions, with the most successful being "Make more
$$$ now!!!".

My ads then were sent throughout the networks, and was seen by others across

the country as early as the next day. Soon, my sample issue was being
downloaded or requested by people who sent postage. Around once a week,
I repost the ads, and get new requests and downloads. SYSOPs of other BBS's
have made the sample issue available on their BBS's, increasing my exposure. As a result, hundreds
of people have gotten a samp
le issue of SHBJ. How much has this cost me? NOTHING. ZIP. Well, actually, I paid a yearly
membership fee of $40 to belong t
o Radio Daze. But, when figured in with all the programs I've gotten from Radio Daze along the
way, the expense has been incred
ibly low. Also, I've had to provide a disk to anyone who's sent in 2 stamps. But, you know what?
When people see that they ca
n make one phone call with their modem and IMMEDIATELY have a sample issue, instead of
having to wait for the mail, almost all w
ill use that method. Wouldn't you? I know I would.

How can you use this method to promote your products and services?
On a local level, you can post an ad on your local BBS(s) telling the
BBS users how they could benefit from what you have. Give BBS users a
special discount if they tell you which BBS they saw your ad on. This way,
you can gauge the effectiveness of each BBS. If you sell a product or
service by mail, use the networks. I've had users in almost every state get
a copy of my newsletter. Don't try to sell your product or service directly
from the ad, unless it's inexpensive. Rather, use the ad to generate
inquiries, and follow up with a complete sales package through the mail.

TIPS TO REMEMBER WHEN USING THIS POWERFUL MARKETING METHOD

 In your ad, as with any ad, don't ramble on and on about the features of your products/services.
Instead, hit hard and early wi
th the direct benefits the consumer will experience. Tell them "what's in it for them." This will
generate interest, rather th
an boredom.
Be sure you put your ads in the right network areas. For example, I limit my
advertising to the small business areas and classified ad areas. I don't
think many people in the geneology areas or gaming areas would be interested
in my newsletter. It would waste my time.

Don't over-advertise. I limit my ads to once a week. If you post your ads
daily or even multiple times per day (I've seen it happen), it clogs up the
message area and turns everyone off to what you have to say. You will be
advised by whoever's in charge of the network to either cut back on your ads
or, if you continue, to cease and desist. Remember, you aren't the only one
using these message areas. The message areas were designed with discussion
in mind, but advertising is permitted if you don't overdo it.

Make sure your ads are appropriate and in good taste. BBS users come in all
ages, so if your product or service is for adults only, confine your
advertising to "adults only" BBS's and networks. Use the same common sense
you'd use if you were advertising in a magazine.

Every BBS will have rules stated regarding usage of the BBS. Follow these rules. You'll find yourself barred from using the BBS if you don't.

CONCLUSION

Used properly, this marketing method can inform large numbers of prospects quickly (no real lead-time, other than message transfer) and cheaply (no cost, other than membership fees, though non-members are almost always allowed to use message areas and networks - it can be totally free!).
If you don't have a modem, by all means go out and get one! You can get a modem card for your computer for as cheap as $50. You can even get one that can also function as a fax for around $100 or less. That's peanuts, considering the benefits you'll get from having one! If you already have a modem, but never put it to use, now you know what to do. Now go do it!

RESOURCES
Here's a short list of computer services and BBS's you should try with your modem. You should be able to get phone numbers of BBS's in your area by consulting computer user groups.

America On-Line - Call (703) 893-6288 for information on membership and phone numbers;

 CompuServe - Call (800) 848-8990 for membership information, and (800) 635-6225 to get a local access phone number

Delphi - Call (800) 695-4005 for questions or call (800) 365-4636 with your modem, press return, at password type BW34 for a free trial!

CLASSIFIED ON-LINE Dial (404) 901-9748.