BBS DESIGN

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BBS DESIGN

You will want a catchy name for the BBS. Don't use trademarks anywhere in the name, or you will get sued.

You should make sure that your address (P.O. Box) is easily found in the BBS so that making contributions is easy. You should include the following in your log-on information screen:

BBS Name, BBS Phone Number (+ area code)
BBS Mailing Address (P.O. Box), Your Name, or Business Name
BBS Hours, Baud Rates & Modem Info
Protocol, Info, Time, Limitations
Number of Lines, Other Available Phone Lines
What Line User Is On, Any Networks
BBS Policy, Statement, Location

This information will probably take up about 2 screens, but don't worry. The only people who will need to read the information are first-time users. They will read it because they want to find out about the BBS.

BBS POLICY

Put simply, your policy will just let people know what your BBS is about. This will determine your users. Always make sure that your policy is easy to find. Don't be afraid to change your policy in the event that you find a better way to work the system. You will need to state such things as how to gain online credit, etc. As you go along, you will find more things you want to add.

ACCESS PRIVILEGES

You will need to verify your users by a phone call, usually within 48 hours. Don't make your users have a hard time qualifying to use the BBS. Let them have a lot of access as soon as they have been verified. You will have to give them access so that you can get a group of users that will want be there. If you want to find out if someone will not deserve access, then grant them full access and see what happens.

If you don't allow certain people in certain areas, don't tell them that. They don't need to know that they can't get somewhere; it will make them angry and jealous. If you have a door only available for businessmen, then only tell businessmen that the door exists.

CHARGE? OR NO CHARGE?

Unless you are planning on having a private BBS, you can plan on NOT making any money with the BBS. You can, however, request donations frequently. If you want to, you can charge a minimal fee to help pay for running the BBS, but I would operate only by donation; you will get more users this way.

One way to get people to donate is to offer bonuses for donations.

For example, you might give more access for donations of $10 per month. If you are charging a fee, then make sure that the users know that it will be worth their money to stay online with your BBS. Don't make them pay for something that they can get free somewhere else. I would say that there is one general rule when it comes to making money with BBSes: If your BBS is a fun BBS, then don't plan on making a profit. If your BBS is for profit, then don't plan on having any fun.

LETTING PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOUR BBS

After you have everything set up, you will need to advertise your BBS. You can do this by placing notices on other BBSes across the country. You might want to advertise locally, also. Most cities have lists of BBSes just in their area. This will get you a lot of local business, because many people like to save money by just dialing BBSes that aren't long distance.

Your ad should tell them what your BBS is called, who it is for, and when they can call. It should state what the BBS is used for, and all that you would want to know if YOU were trying to decide if you wanted to join this BBS.

You might want to make up some fliers and take them around to all the computer stores and places that sell software. Let them know that you would just like them to make it available to people who walk into their store. In most cases, they will be happy to be of service to you. Just make sure that a lot of people know about your BBS. You might want to consider advertising in a national magazine, such as "Boardwatch Magazine."

You should also consider placing your BBS number and modem infor- mation on your business cards and letterhead. This way, anyone who sees your card will see your BBS number.

Don't expect people to start calling overnight. They might, but don't expect it. You will start getting a steady line of users in about 3-4 months. The more you advertise, the quicker your response wil be. If you don't start getting calls in a few months, then don't despair; just keep trying to spread the word, and eventually, people will start calling frequently. If you still aren't getting calls, you might find that your format isn't appealing to the public. If this is the case, you may want to change the format and start all over. Just stay informed about what the public is interested in, and you will soon start getting users.

ABUSIVE CALLERS

Every once in a while, you will get a caller who is just there to cause problems. If you notice that it just happens once, then give them a chance to correct their own behavior. If they do it more than once, then you should send them private mail outlining what it is that you don't like about their behavior. If you notice that they are behaving better, send them a thank-you note; if it doesn't stop, then tell them that if they don't stop immediately, then you will terminate their access. If they cause trouble once more, then take them out of the user list. They won't have access next time they try to call the BBS. They will have to try to become a new user again.

When you terminate a user, you should tell them why they were term-
inated, and explain that you would like them to join again in the future after
they change their behavior. You should make them stay off the BBS for 30 days,
60 days, or 90 days, depending on the degree of disturbance.

You should be aware of crashers and hackers who will no doubt try to
ruin your BBS. You should have some fellow sysops try to log on and crash the
system to find out if it is possible. If they can't, then you should probably
be pretty safe. You just need to make sure that nobody can get where they
don't need to be. Unless you charge for access, or brag about how nobody
can "hack" your system, you shouldn't have very many problems with hackers
or crashers.