USING AN ONLINE INFORMATION SERVICE

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USING AN ONLINE INFORMATION SERVICE

These services are supported by users. Users pay an access fee to use the service. You can pay either a one-time access fee, a fee per minute/hour you are online, or some require you to pay a monthly access fee. Anyhow, the charge usually includes an instruction manual, as well as some online credit.

Sometimes the cost for connect time will vary depending on the speed of the modem you are using. For example, you will be charged less for a 1200-baud modem than you would for a 9600-baud modem. They might also charge more or less depending on the time you are calling. You might be required to pay a fee for special access to some of the files, doors, or conferences. However it is worked, the charges are most easily billed to your credit card.

Choosing A Service

When you are choosing an online service, you will need to do a little research. You should make a note of the things you are looking for in an online information service. When you have decided what you are looking for, you will need to "shop" around and look at several of the services and find one that best fits your needs.

Many online services offer starter kits for new users. The starter kits offer a variety of things to you. It will include registration information, tutorials, users guide and several other useful items available.

If you can't decide on a service, then just sign up for one that sounds interesting to you. Try it for a few weeks/months and see if it is what you want. If it isn't, then quit that one and try another one. It won't take long until you find the one that suits you best. If a service only charges you when you log on to it, then it won't hurt you to use it when you want to, and don't if you don't want to use it.

Keeping Costs Down

You probably have noticed that the major disadvantage of online services is the cost. You can run up quite a bill if you aren't careful. Rates very from $2.50 per hour all the way up to as much as a hundred dollars or more if you are accessing a special database. The best way to keep the cost down is to limit access time, and don't waste time while online.

You will want to look over the user's manual for a few hours before you use the OIS (Online Information Service). This will give you an understanding of the system and how it works, and will save you some money by saving time online. You should find out if you can skip the menu screens so you don't waste time searching for things.

You can also save on costs by taking advantage of the OIS's billing information. You might be able to access the OIS cheaper after 11 pm, or on weekends. You might find it cheaper to operate at a slower modem speed.

When chatting only, you should have the modem speed at 300-baud; it will not seem any different, but you will be able to notice the difference in price.

If you are going to access a database, you need to set your modem at its fastest rate. Sending information at a fast speed will save a lot of money. You should also use the highest speed when up and downloading files. Most online services will give you a better rate when you operate faster.

Tips and Techniques

A lot of the services have a variety of commands that are similar. This makes it easier to explore additional services. Each OIS will have its own unique functions, but most will generally operate the service and follow the commands. Most of the OISes use either BTNA, SprintNet, or other packet switching networks to route calls from users around the country. You can get local access numbers by calling the customer service number.

Before you sign up, call the support line and ask them whether or not there is a demo account that you can log onto so that you can get information and try the service out. You should also find out if there are activities for you online that do not cost anything, such as online help, checking and billing information, and filling out questionnaires.

When you log on for the first time, you should make it a quick visit. You should log on and look at some of the menus, and get a feel for the service. Make sure that you capture a command list so that you can read them later offline. After you do that you should log off. It will do you some good to print out a list of the commands and post them near your computer for future access.

Most of the OISes are set up in pages. A page is a menu or a screen. Find where the page identifier appears on the menu. This may be a number or a header. This will allow you to jump from anywhere in the service to any other place. Areas that are frequently used will have special commands, such as: GO MAIL will take you to the mail menu. You can press T and you will be taken to the main menu.

Log-off commands will vary from one to the other. Most of the time it will either be BYE, EXIT, or QUIT. But, if you enter these commands at a submenu, you might just be taken back to the previous menu. You will need to test it out and find out what works.

If you remember one thing I say, it should be this: NEVER TELL ANYONE WHAT YOUR PASSWORD IS! This is a no-no. Remember this: No authorized representative will EVER ask you for your password. If someone does, then tell them that if they needed to know it, then they already would know it. If someone gets your password, they might log on and spend a lot of your money, and you WILL have to pay for it. One way to make sure that you don't give it to the wrong person is to make sure that anytime you type the password it shouldn't appear on the screen. Most services will just show something like "********************" as you are typing in your password. As you type, the screen will show a new asterisk. If you give out your password, then change it immediately.