

GETTING STARTED

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GETTING STARTED

In this chapter, you will learn how to log on to the typical bulletin board. It will also show you how to set up user ID, look around, use BBSes, and then log off.

Finding A BBS

To avoid paying a lot while you experiment with BBSes, you should only call local BBSes until you get the hang of it. It doesn't really matter what time you call them; most of them operate around the clock, 7 days a week. As you learn how to find a BBS, you will learn how to choose the ones that you wish to contact.

If you have friends who use BBSes, then you should ask them to recommend to you a BBS that you would like. They will know which ones are good and which ones aren't. You can also go to your local computer store and ask them if they have list of local BBSes. Most likely they do, and will be happy to give you one. You can also look for computer magazines that will often list nationwide BBSes, if you look around, they are not hard to find.

Before you contact a BBS, you will need to know its baud rate, the number of stop bits, and the parity. If you are working with a list of BBSes, then they will have these items listed along with the BBS number. It will look something like: 12/24/9600-8-1-N. All that this means is that it will operate on 1200-2400- or 9600-baud with 8 bits, 1 stop bit, and has No parity. A lot of BBSes are upgrading to 9600-bps, and you will probably not find any that run on 300.

Calling A BBS

Once you have decided on a BBS to call, you are ready to start. Get into your communications program and then dial the phone number of the BBS. If you need directions, look in the program's help screen.

Parameters

If the BBS number didn't list parameters, then go with the standard ones: 2400-baud, 8 bits, 1 stop bit, and NO parity.

Note: If your software has screen capture, then you will need to make sure you turn it on before you log on. This will allow you to save every thing so you can view it after you log off.

Dial the Number

You will now need to dial the BBS number. Most BBSes are busy a lot. You might have to try for a while before you get through. But, keep trying; you will get through.

If your modem has a speaker, you will be able to hear the busy signal. As soon as it rings, you can get ready to log on. When you get through, you will hear a high-pitched tone. This will tell you that your modem is trying

to match parameters with the other modems. As soon as the modems decide on a speed to talk at, the speaker will shut off. More than likely, at this point you will see the word CONNECT on your screen.

If the BBS doesn't display information right off, then you will need to press ENTER a time or two. Some BBSes wait for you to acknowledge the connection before they talk to you. If your screen still doesn't show anything, you probably have trouble on the line. If not, you are ready to go.

User Verification

You will probably have to wait a little while before you are allowed full access to the BBS. They will probably make you wait about a week for verification. They will probably call you to make sure everything is correct and that you are who you say you are. As soon as they have verified this information, you will be allowed full access. Until you have been verified, you will probably only be able to read and enter messages.

Different BBSes will verify you in various ways. Some will turn around and call you immediately. Others will make you send in a copy of your driver's license and your password. Still others will ask you what your modem's phone number is, and they will call your computer right back and have you type in your password, and then you are verified.

Donations

What? Give them money? Yes, many sysops will frequently ask users to donate to the BBS. It does cost money to have one. Many BBSes are shut down because the sysop can't afford to keep it in operation. Making monthly donations will help make sure that it remains in operation.

Sometimes the sysop will ask for money for certain projects. They may want money to increase file space for messages, as well as faster modems. When you donate money, you will usually get a thank-you from the sysop. They might give you more time on the BBS, or they might even make you an assistant (if you donate frequently).

Access Fees

You will find that about 10% of all BBSes will require you to pay for your on-line privileges. The cost depends on what BBS you are on, and how much they want to charge. Most of the ones that charge will be the ones that cater specifically to one interest.

BBSes, unless they are run as a business, usually don't break even. They have to pay about \$20 per line. They usually have about 5 lines, so that is \$100. They have to charge a little, and they still need donations to try to come close to even.

You will not have to pay for access fees when you first log on. If they try to get you to, it is not worth it. Most will let you have a free

"trial" period. You can explore the different files and find out if it is something that you want to get into. **REMEMBER, JUST BECAUSE YOU PAID FOR IT, DOESN'T MEAN IT WAS WORTH PAYING FOR.**

You shouldn't pay for access until you are sure you want to use the BBS. Make sure that you are comfortable with logging on and off with ease. By the time that you feel comfortable with the BBS and the way it works, you should be able to make an informed decision on whether or not you want to pay membership fees.