

SETTING UP A BBS FOR YOURSELF

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SETTING UP A BBS FOR YOURSELF

If it came down to it, each sysop would have their own reason for wanting to be a sysop. But, the most common reasons would probably be: it's fun, it's a challenge, and it's educational. Before you go out and spend a month's wages to purchase a computer and a modem, you will need to know about being a BBS, and you will need to decide what your BBS will be like. In this chapter, I will show you just what it is like to BE A SYSOP.

PLANNING FOR YOUR BBS

While some people get right into it, and have no problems getting started, most people will tell you that it takes a little hard work if you want to have a successful BBS. Even though several of the sysops have problems with getting started, and having everything work in "synch," the thing that most people face is their own pride.

If you forget everything else I say here, remember this: Nearly 95% of the BBSes that fail within the first year do so because the sysop can't deal with negative remarks. One thing you should know is that if your BBS doesn't offend **SOMEBODY**, then you probably won't find **ANYBODY** who likes it either. This is true with any business; if you have people for it, someone **WILL** be against it.

You will need to decide what you want your BBS to be. Will it be a Games BBS, or will it be a Business BBS? Will everybody (public) have access to this BBS, or just a select few who know about it? Will you allow uploading and downloading? What about payments? Will you allow messages? How about Chatting conferences? Will you access a network?

You will need to know such things as - What software you will use? What will your on-line policy be? What time limits will you set? Will you give people bonuses for on-line time? While all of these things are usually taken for granted when calling a BBS, they are things that you will have to know when operating your **OWN** BBS.

There are a few guidelines that you should follow when you are deciding how you will set up your BBS.

1. Keep your files in order. If you have 5 files on IBM PCs, then put them one right after the other; don't spread them out around the BBS. If you devote 5 files to IBM PCs, then you should also devote 5 files to Macintosh, etc.

2. Write your BBS policy before you set up the BBS. Users should know what the rules are when they log on. You should have a file online for them to download and read.

3. You should keep your commands simple and easy to understand. You will want to have "H" be help, and "G" be goodbye. If "H" is for "Hang up," then most people will be confused and will not call back.

CHOOSING SOFTWARE

You should use one simple rule when choosing software: Look at the software as a user, not as a sysop. Make sure YOU understand it. If you can't, how do you expect anybody else to?

When choosing software, you should make sure that the software you choose is a kind that the users will want. If you are providing a BBS that is for chatting a lot, then you should find out what kind of software those people like to use.

The following features are ones that you should consider before and while you are choosing software;

Good password protection	Good security features
Public & private messages	Online help
Easy-to-use menus	Good file & message system
Advanced user-access levels	Doors (Games, Mail, etc.)
Multiple protocols	Online Questionnaires
Networking ability	Downloading ability
Usage log	Multi-line ability
Upload/Download stats	Online time counter(s)
Remote sysop capability	Chatting
Good User/Sysop Relations	

You will want to get copies of shareware BBS programs, or you can write to BBS companies and ask them for information about their products. Ask the sysops on the BBSes that you use, what kind they would recommend for the type of BBS you are planning on having. You will no doubt find that a BBS that is fun to log onto but may be a real pain to operate. At least in the beginning.

A real must: Choose the BBS software BEFORE you choose a computer and modem. Choosing the software first will allow you to make a better selection among hardware.

CHOOSING YOUR COMPUTER

Most IBMs and their clones are acceptable for BBSes. These are good because they are pretty cheap and the parts and accessories aren't expensive,

either. There are good computers for other types of BBSes, too.

If you are planning to offer a BBS for a certain type of non-IBM compatible computer (i.e. Amiga), then you probably should have that type of computer. If you have an Amiga computer for an Amiga BBS, then you can offer Amiga programs for the users to download. If you ran a BBS that was for Amiga users and your computer was an IBM, then you wouldn't be able to have programs that they could run from the BBS.

Whatever you choose, you need to make sure that you have enough hard-disk space for the program and files. If you were planning to run a "one-line-message-only" BBS with no files, etc., you would only need about 15 megabytes of hard-disk space. But, if you are planning on having a BBS with "the works" (doors, bulletins, multiple lines, exchanging files, etc.), then you can't stop short of 125-175 megabytes of available hard-disk space. Many of the file BBSes use CD-ROM drives to allow for more disk space. Combined network conference and file BBSes generally have a "gigabyte" (1,000 megabytes) of files and messages online at any given time.

You will need to devote this computer ONLY to the BBS. You can't use it for anything else. If you use the computer, it will disconnect the line you have connected for incoming calls.

CHOOSING A MODEM

Ask the BBS sysops in your area what modems they prefer. Also ask them why they like those particular modems. This will give you an idea of what kind you might like to get. You should find out how dependable the modem is. It should be able to withstand several months of non-stop use.

You should buy the best and fastest modem that you can afford. Many of the modem companies will give a discount to sysops, so you will not have to pay a whole lot for the modem.

PHONES

You can have more than one phone line for your BBS without having to pay for a business line as long as the line is non-commercial; that is, the line is not used for business. You shouldn't put your voice phone number on the BBS anywhere. People will call you at all times of the night wanting to ask you questions, etc.

If you want to allow people to send contributions, (YOU WILL) and send comments and questions, then you should set up a Post Office Box. NEVER give out your home address. That would allow a thief to find out where they could pick up several thousand dollars worth of software and hardware.

