

Online Message Board / Forum Manager

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Hobbyists and business professional's alike love to chat about their respective trades on message boards or forums everywhere. Banner, pay per click advertising or affiliate sales allow a small portion of a forum's traffic to monetized. A forum can be added to an existing website, its most common application or alternatively be established as a stand alone site. The forum owner or manager will initially market and maintain the forum, with a little web know how the opportunities are abound.

Before The Start-Up, Let's Not Get Ahead Of Ourselves

A basic understanding of marketing for the web and monetizing traffic through advertising is essential. Basic web development skills will certainly help the initial setup but are by no means required. You'll also need a basic office setup with a work space, desk and computer. Since you'll online during your entire working day a high speed internet connection is essential. Looking at a screen all day can also cause your eyes to take strain, invest early on in an LCD monitor and an ergonomically sound chair.

The Start-Up

Forums work best when applied to niches. A classic example of this is a forum for web masters of all types called Web Master World. Do extensive research on what is currently available in your field of interest. Don't re-invent the wheel, rather look for a niche which has forum facilities that could be improved upon.

When choosing forum software you have two routes from which to choose. There are numerous free forum packages of which the big five are phpBB, Invision Power Board, Snitz, Web Wiz Forums and IkonBoard. Alternatively you can purchase commercial forum software which is more stable and offers better support than free software. Commercial packages usually charge an initially purchase fee and a nominal yearly fee. Which option you choose will usually depend on your budget.

You'll also need a domain and hosting. Domains can be easily purchased from your internet service provider. Hosting is truly a case of you pay for what you get. Once again your budget will decide whether you'll start with a budget hosting package or a more expensive and better supported package.

Making It Work

The early stages in the life of a forum are the hardest. Initially you'll have to add content yourself and possibly pay several contributors to build your content. Forums are regularly spammed, so ensure your forum is always spam free and well organised. Once your forum is generating a small amount of revenue, pay a regular contributor to moderate user submissions and spend more of your time on marketing and monetizing traffic.

Once your forum is highly successful charging a membership fee is an option. If your ad revenue is sufficient for your time and expenses this is not a recommended move.

Marketing

Ensure your forum is optimized correctly for search engine traffic, initially add regular content yourself and attempt to get reciprocal links from similar focussed sites and directories.

Don't Forget

If your forum mushrooms over night, which is possible due to a popular article or high profile link, your bandwidth costs could sky rocket. Keep a constant eye on your bandwidth figures and adjust your package option before getting penalized for going over the limit.