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Building Your Business Online with Message Boards and Forums

Visiting the message boards and forums where you'll find your target market, finding people looking for answers or help and offering suggestions, advice and experience is one of the surest business-building strategies on the Internet.

by **Jackie Ulmer**

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It truly is a world wide web and there is no better indicator of that than visiting the many communities that make up the internet. These communities are often referred to as "Discussion Boards, Message Boards" or "Online Forums."

> ***When "worked" correctly, this is a dynamic way to locate your target market, begin the relationship building process and ultimately sponsor people into your business.***

I say "worked" correctly, because there are some definite "do's and don'ts" if you want to be successful with this activity.

A discussion or message forum is like a bulletin board, online. It's the "water cooler" of the Internet. It's where people go to research, express themselves, share ideas, share needs, etc.

Typically, one just registers a user name, password and email address to gain entry into the forum. There are online message boards and forums

for virtually anything you can think of, and some things you may not want to think of!

I first stumbled upon message boards and online forums when I was quite green to the internet and looking for tips and advice on website building, autoresponders and more technical things. I used the search engines to find these online communities and would ask questions and learn from the "experts" out there, willing to share freely in the online environment.

Before long, I discovered that people would include a link to their personal websites at the end of messages that they would post. Often, out of curiosity, I would click to follow the link and see what I could learn.

> ***I realized that I could place links to my website at the end of my questions and comments posted online. Pretty soon, people began showing up at my website and signing up for my newsletter, and some even joined my business.***

Once I became a little more "web savvy" I began looking for places to participate that would capture my target audience.

Truly, some of my greatest successes online have come from participating in these communities with like-minded people! I view it like joining a networking or leads group in the offline world. I don't stand up and share my "30-second commercial" though. My website link at the end of each message does that for me.

One of my target markets is young mothers at home, or working mothers looking for a way to be home. So, any message forum that involved topics for discussion that would attract that group would be a great place to develop a “presence” and promote myself.

It may take some time and research to find the ones that are right for you.

I always sign up for the forum (if required) and lurk and listen for a few days to get a feel for the participants and to get an idea of protocol.

> ***Don't post until you are sure of the rules! Your reputation is*** all ***you have online and you want to keep that intact.***

I only participate in forums that allow me to at least post a signature line or URL with my message. I want people to be able to find a way back to me!

Networking Online

Now, the idea is NOT to blast onto a message board, wowing everyone with your product and your opportunity. Just like offline, that's a fast ticket to nowhere. Many people on these forums are turned off by network marketing, because of unscrupulous "posters" who do nothing but blast their opportunity. You could even be banned from certain forums for doing this.

The most effective way to use the forums is to provide something of value. Share an article that you have read (such as from this magazine), or answer questions that others have posted.

Here's my message board strategy:

I visit the message boards where I will find my target market and find people looking for answers or help and offer suggestions, advice and experience.

Another thing I do is begin conversations on these boards by posting tips for success, recruiting ideas, marketing ideas, motivators, etc.

And, I ask questions, too!

I offer off-topic ideas as well, such as quick and easy recipes for time starved parents; a motivational quote, or share a success story of someone on my team and how they got there.

Over time, my name begins to be known on the board and I establish myself as credible and knowledgeable. People then begin visiting my website, signing up for my newsletter and tapping into my autoresponders. This is my goal.

Develop a signature line that is catchy and creates curiosity. After all, you are looking for the "click" that gets them into your site and into relationship with you.

Most forums and message boards have a place to hyper link your web site, and that's where I put in the exact page of my site that I want them to visit, and a title for the link, which varies.

I may put— "Is Your Internet Strategy Working?" designed to target those who also want to build online.

Or, "Our team added over 100 new business builders last month" for those who are excited about Network Marketing, but aren't having the kind of success they desire.

On a parenting site, I might use something like— "How You can Become a WAHM, too" targeting those who are working outside of the home and do not want to be.

Play around a little and get creative. Have fun and test things over and over. It's basic advertising and we know that successful advertising takes time and fine-tuning. This is your "30-second commercial" and you want to be careful to make your commercial powerful and full of impact.

When you first join a board or community, hang out lurking for a bit, and get to know the culture of the board. If there is a place to create a profile, do so and be sure to include your own website link in it. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- Always use your full, real name.
- Never bash or trash another company.
- Offer valuable ideas and suggestions.
- Don't advertise, be subtle.
- Be a consistent visitor, and establish yourself.
- Always be honest, ethical and have integrity. Give up your need to be "right" when a topic comes up that you disagree with.

Do NOT post a whole string of website links and opportunities. That's a real turn-off and tends to make one look like a watch salesman in a trench coat near Central Park!

The only secret to mastering this form of recruiting is to "show up" regularly. This is one method of getting people coming to YOU, and that's our goal, right?

Here are some great resources to begin finding discussion and message forums:

http://www.greatestnetworker.com

http://www.ryze.com

http://www.powerfulintentions.com

http://www.tile.net

http://www.hotboards.com/

http://www.entrepreneur-web.com/index_1.shtml

http://www.businessnation.com/forums/

http://www.theworknet.com/forum/

Another way to find forums is to go to

http://www.google.com

... and type in "**subject** message forums" in the search box, replacing the word **"subject"** with whatever type of board you are seeking. See what comes up. Remember, it does NOT have to be a business based forum - Work at home moms, parenting sites, and network marketing sites are a few of my targets. Areas that interest you are a good starting place. And, it's something you'll be inclined to do because you enjoy it.

Remember, have integrity, don't get into cat fights, have fun and also come from a place of contribution! Be real and authentic and watch people flock to you from all across the "Net!"

Jackie Ulmer, a veteran Home Based Business Owner, has coached and trained thousands of representatives both inside and outside of her sales organization. One of her primary goals is to help others succeed. Jackie and her husband Mark have two children, Justin, 13, and Lexi, 10. They live in their dream house in Lake Arrowhead, California. She can be reached through her web sites at StreetSmartWealth.com

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ATTACHMENT

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Kids and balance

Getting my children involved has created a wonderful atmosphere for me to conduct business, with them around, and still enjoy the full benefits of working from home.

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