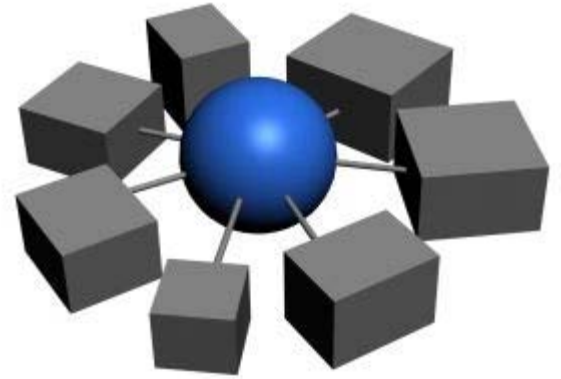# How to Set Up and Run a Great Forum

By Joseph Park

A forum is such a fundamental, important tool for an Internet marketer. The second you can develop a community that self-moderates and continuously grows, you can generate additional leads, draw more readers to your sites, and handle customer support much more easily.

But, actually building a forum is much more difficult than a blog or simple squeeze page. It requires the right software, careful installation and a slew of features and add-ons that will help make it functional for search engines and your users alike.

Choosing the Right Software

There are multiple options for how you'll build your forum. Software options have existed for forum creation since the mid-1990s and if you do it right, you'll be able to save yourself quite a bit of time.

The first question you should ask though is how much money you're willing to spend. If you're short on cash, you may want to consider an open source solution like PHPbb. However, when considering open source, remember that support is always minimal.

While there are thousands of developers online who can answer your questions, none of them are devoted to doing so and you may not like their answers. With a forum, especially for a major site launch, it can be devastating to get caught in a hole with no tech support.

For those looking to spend a few dollars, Vbulletin is the forum builder of choice. As one of the premiere software tools online, Vbulletin is used for many major communities, including on major corporate sites.

You'll also have the option of receiving blogging and CMS platform support along with unlimited support and updates in the future. The cost is between $200 and $300 depending on the level of the software you buy, but your options are fairly numerous for what you can do with it.

If you do purchase Vbulletin, make sure you get the VB SEO add-on for it. This tool will make sure your posts are properly indexed in search engines with friendly URLs and META tags. A forum can be extremely useful for SEO purposes, but much more so if you install the right SEO add-on.

Installation of Your Forums

The installation process is not as hard as some software tools, but you'll need a basic understanding of server-side software like PHP and MySQL to create and manage the databases. If you want to customize any aspects of the forum, you'll need to get into the files to make changes.

Unless you're well trained or have experience with the technology behind a forum installation, you may consider hiring a professional coder from a site like RentaCoder to help install and setup your forum.

Hiring someone on RentaCoder is very simple, requiring a free account and verified credit card. Make sure to only hire someone with specific experience AND feedback related to forum installations. Just because they have a general idea of how it works, doesn't mean they are an expert.

Managing Your Forum

A forum is a bulky, time hungry tool that can make you a lot of money and build your email list, but can also devour your time if you're not careful. Instead of losing money by not having a firm control of your user base, you will want to assign or hire moderators who can manage the daily operations.

It is important to have a series of safeguards in place to minimize spam and moderators to reduce any unwanted argument or obscenity. If your forum is directly related to a product you sell, it is a good idea to have someone with technical knowledge of your product to review posts for questions.

Ultimately, a forum is a very powerful tool, but you need to make sure it is properly installed, managed and monitored. Do those things and you will gain a tremendous amount of benefits from your new forum.