



Table of Contents

Before You Begin	4
Rules for Your Behavior.....	5
Finding Your Forum.....	8
Researching Potential Forums.....	8
Big-Boards.com	8
Using the Search Engines	9
Checking Out Your List	10
Criteria for the Forum	11
The Rare Circumstance	11
It's Not a Free Country	13
Conducting Your Business	14
Know Your Product and Its Competitors	14
How to Break the Ice for a Potential Sale	15

Introduction

Forum marketing may seem like an easy way to market your products, but it's actually a bit more complicated when you take a look at what you have to do to do it successfully.

It's not just going to a forum and posting messages about what you want to sell; you have to gain the trust of the people at the forum. If they suspect you're a spammer, then you're probably going to be out really fast, and then you'll have to start over somewhere else.

You're going have to learn how to fit in and behave, and then you're going to have to learn how to bring up what it is you're selling. You can't just inject it into every conversation.

Joining a forum and participating in the community is going to take a lot of your time, so be prepared. You could find yourself up late at night posting on the forums especially if you start to really get into it and enjoy the community.

It's good if you do because most people can't retain the detachment while trying to be personable. It can make more sales.

Before You Begin

You need to think about what you're doing this for. You can join other forums that are not business related and you don't have to pay attention to this. But, for your business, forum marketing offers some special benefits.

- **Backlinks:** These are links on an “authority” site that go directly to your site. This is a good backlink and the more of these you can have, the better off you're going to be. Backlinks will come from your forum signature, posts you make, and potentially your forum profile.
- **Traffic:** Obviously if you have links to your site from an “authority” site, you should expect some traffic which will come first from the board traffic itself and then from the search engines as they crawl the forum and discover any relevant links you might have posted.
- **Recognition:** If you can get yourself seen by the forum community as a person with good intentions, you're going to get people who like you. Without knowing it at first, they will give what you say more weight over what someone else would say. Recognition happens when the forum members start recommending that you answer the questions presented by someone.

- **Expert Status:** Not long after you become recognized as the go-to person for answers, you'll become an expert. Never, ever call yourself an expert; instead, show people you're an expert by offering intelligent solutions to their problems.

Rules for Your Behavior

Remember what you were told when you were a child? If you don't have anything nice to say, then don't say anything at all. Many people interpret that different ways, but use common sense: it doesn't mean that you make it a point to tell everyone you have nothing nice to say so you'll say nothing; it really means to keep your mouth shut.

In order to make this work, you're going to have to have your own set of rules. The forums will impose some rules on you, as a user, but you're going to add a few on yourself just to make sure.

1. Always obey all of the forum rules.

You don't want to get penalized and risk getting banned. This would be detrimental and will set you back severely.

2. Do not troll.

Being a forum troll may sound fun and exciting, but you're here to

make money and you can't do that by giving out false information or even spamming.

3. Be nice to everyone.

It's not enough to just not troll. You also need to be courteous to everyone you meet. You never know if that person you just made angry and called "stupid" would have bought \$1000 worth of product from you.

4. Do not start any fights.

So you're starting to see a trend here. You're going to be nice to everyone anyway, so this shouldn't be a problem. You don't want to cause any waves. You don't want to be considered the troublemaker. It may get you some attention on the television but it will just be harmful to you.

5. Stay away from topics of religion or politics.

These are the two biggest areas that will tend to lead into flame wars and other nasty events. If you have to bring any government into the discussion whatsoever or invoke the name of a deity, then the conversation is not for you.

6. Be helpful to everyone.

You're right, it's not enough to just be nice and not start any fights. The best way to get reputation on a forum is to be helpful. If you know the answer to a question, then by all means answer it. Let people know you're there to help, but not that you're there to step

in the middle of a fight. If you're not gifted with natural ambassadorship, then this could go horribly wrong.

7. Don't sell anything initially.

You don't want to go to the forum and start selling from the minute you validated your email address. You'll be considered a spammer and hated almost immediately.

8. Be a participant in the community.

Not only are you going to respond and be helpful to others' posts, but you're also going to start threads of your own and talk about subjects others might have an interest.

Even though you're going to be friendly, don't mistake that as "making friends". These people are all potential customers and you should, as much as you might hate it, remember that the customer is always right. It's okay to not truly believe that, but you should never ever let it get in the way of your relationships on the forum.

Finding Your Forum

This is basically a three-step process, and if you try to keep yourself focused on one part of the phase instead of jumping between phases, you're going to stay on track a lot better.

During the first phase, you will be using a couple of different ways to find potential forums. When you've found a list of forums, you'll visit them in the second phase. After you've visited the forums and checked their quality against the required criteria, you'll evaluate each forum's potential marketability in the third phase.

Researching Potential Forums

You're going to use two different resources for this phase: forum directories and search engines. You can then take that information and see how it ranks in Alexa to determine the forum with the most traffic, among other things.

Big-Boards.com

A forum directory lists a lot of different forums that can be sorted by popularity, number of members, total posts, posts made recently, and a

whole lot more. One of the most widely known forum directories is big-boards.com.

This site looks like it was thrown together in a night, and it probably was, but it's an all-in-one site for people who are looking for new forums to haunt. This is a good place to start but it isn't necessarily the best source of information – if it was then I'd tell you to just use this.

First, it's outdated. But, being outdated is good because then you can get a snapshot of age. If the forum was popular when the site was current, and it's still somewhat popular, then you've probably got a good forum.

Using the Search Engines

When you've compiled a decent list of forums, you'll put that list aside temporarily and then start using the search engines to find more. When using the search engine, you want to search for two particular types of phrases:

- “keyword or keyword phrase” forum
- “keyword or keyword phrase” message board

Put some of the more popular keywords for your particular niche inside the quotes and remember to search with quotes since you want an exact match for your search.

You don't have to get too extensive since you want the easiest to find forums instead of those that have used SEO extensively to get themselves listed higher in the rankings.

When you're satisfied with your preliminary list of forums that you want to try, go to Alexa.com and do a search for each. You'll be able to get their current traffic statistics as well as their rank on the web.

If the site was listed as a popular site on big-boards.com and is still popular on Alexa.com, then it's probably a forum you should put at the top of your list.

Checking Out Your List

Now you're going to visit each of the forums. Simply go to the main URL for each of the forums, read the rules and terms thoroughly, and then sign up if the forum passes muster. It can do this initially if it fulfills the criteria requirement below.

Criteria for the Forum

Just as the forum would have rules and terms that you must agree to so you can be a member, so should you have the same privilege. For the forum in question to be considered remotely useful, it must have the following features:

1. **Commercial activity.**

If you can't conduct business on the forum, then that's the first deal-breaker. You need to be able to run your business. You're not there to make friends.

Special Note: If you happen to have gone through all of the forums on your list and none of them allow commercial activity, then you can, in rare circumstances, just consider the next requirement.

2. **Links in your forum signature to external and potentially unrelated sites.**

Every time you make a post, you're giving away ad space. That's your space if you don't have a forum signature or if you're on a board that doesn't allow it.

The Rare Circumstance

If it is not possible to get into a forum that allows commercial activity, it's still possible to use forum marketing but it's slightly trickier. For these

forums you will never advertise your product directly, but you will have an innocuous link in your signature that will go to your site which can sell them something.

Proceed as normal by becoming the expert and being recognized. Never recommend your product, but recommend a product type in your forum posts. For example:

- *“What’s the best way to get rid of fleas on my dog?”*
- *“Combination treatment of a flea collar, a flea bath, and then a drop of **special flea medication** behind the ear.”*

While your signature might have something like:

“I thought I’d never get rid of my dog’s fleas! What a mess! At least he’s flea free now!”

Then you could have a link to your page, blog, or some other external site which could feature a dog and a treatment that you’re selling. This can be very difficult to pull off and can crumble in seconds if you’re not careful, which is why it’s recommended to avoid this situation.

It's Not a Free Country

One of the biggest mistakes people make is they will get angry and vocal if they get moderated by having their posts deleted, moved, or locked. The reason they believe they have a right to become angry is they believe this is a free country and we should be able to say anything we want.

While this is true, it only applies to the public places as noted in the First Amendment to the United States of America's Constitution. Other free speech clauses will have similar qualifications; the forum belongs to the moderators. They are the judge, jury, and executioner and you should be willing to accept the punishment if you overstep your bounds.

This is why it's best to avoid all fights – even if you have the best of intentions and your argument is good, solid, and valid; there is nothing that can combat the “Ban User” command any forum administrator has.

As soon as you get moderated once, you'll have gained their attention and your posts could become scrutinized in the future. You do not want this kind of attention at all.

Conducting Your Business

Now that you've found your forum, it's time to start making it useful. As I've stated in rule #8 before, you're going to be a participant in the community.

Ideally, you wouldn't join a forum that is about Office Network Management if you're trying to sell a cure for fleas; you'd probably be joining a pet forum. So, find threads you could post in and give it a shot. Be on the lookout for people who have questions and try to be the first to answer them.

Know Your Product and Its Competitors

This means you'll have to be knowledgeable about your product and product line. You'll even have to be an expert about your rival's products and other mainstream offerings.

If you can be aware of the advantages of your rivals and point out their disadvantages, it will be much easier to pull off a persuasive argument in favor for yours over theirs.

How to Break the Ice for a Potential Sale

This is only one example as there are potentially unlimited scenarios, but consider the following for a near perfect set-up for your product:

Forum Poster: I have a problem with my dog's fleas. I can't seem to get rid of them. I have tried bathing and collars and they're just not doing the trick.

You: I can't tell you how bad I feel for you and your dog – I just got finished ridding my dog of fleas. The fleas must be stubborn this year, huh? I got this product called X and I was supposed to place it on his ear. I have pictures of how I did it on my page.

Obviously, this is oversimplified as probably no one would need a picture of where to put the medication, but it's an example of what to do. You sympathize, establish common ground by telling her about your dog's fleas, acknowledge they're hard to remove, introduce the miracle product, and lead them to your page about how you did it.