

THE ROAD

To

SUCCESS

In light of the sudden success of BBS's such as the Buzzard's Nest and the Holy Grail, I wondered, "What made BBS's successful?". I set out to answer this question and interviewed six sysops of six of the greatest BBS's around: The Buzzard of the Buzzard's Nest, Capn Crook of Smash Palace Mac, Far Side of the Kremlin, Fast Frankie of Mac Masters, Mr.T of the Holy Grail, and The Terrorist of the Elites Hideaway.

Surprisingly, the success of a BBS has nothing to do with luck or how many megs of storage it has. Capn Crook stresses planning as one of the most important factors in creating a BBS, "A lot of thinking is done before users can use it. Message bases, how many? What topics? Transfer sections, how many categories? How strict will you be in the policing of new files?" Creativity is very important. "Creativity is a must. If you run a basic default BBS, nobody will call. A sysop must modify, in whatever ways he can, the software on which the board is running," says Fast Frankie. Mr.T and the Terrorist both mention that there should be some sort of theme in the BBS. "I kinda like to have the names of the subs and forums on the same theme as the

name of the BBS, some might find it confusing, some might like it,” says Mr.T. Also, having too many subs may turn off users. “One sub-board is not going to cut it on any system. On the other hand, 15 or 20 sub-boards are way too much for any mortal to scan through. So I have about 8-9 sub-boards. Just enough to keep a variety of conversation going,” says Fast Frankie.

But what about the transfer sections? Capn Crook says, “Also, I have no ratios in the xfer section, and for that I am one in a handful of a dying breed. But I refuse to put ratios in the xfer section. Let’s look at this...I have 175 users...the odds of uploading a new ware are not good for anyone! One person uploads the rest of us leech it! That’s the way it will always be...so why demand people to upload?!? It only upsets the ones who try to maintain that impossible ratio request and the ones who do not have the better connections will probably not call your BBS again for the little guilt feelings that they might have. Pirates eat quiche too!” Fast Frankie says, “Today, most users ignore the message base. This makes sysops like me CrAZY. I was brought up in the modem world with the message base being the backbone of all BBS’s. Without a message base, a BBS had no persona whatsoever. Today, it’s exactly opposite. 75% of my users head straight for the files. They are not leeches, mind you, but their priorities have been redefined over the years. So, I guess by popular demand, today’s most important attribute is a healthy file section.”

The Terrorist mentions something very unique that can make or break a BBS ...the atmosphere, “Many people that call around like an ‘atmosphere’. On The Elites Hideaway, I have heard many people say that I have an unusually good atmosphere. I believe that is because I personally select all the users. Meaning the users have to fit in a certain category to get on the system, which makes almost each and everyone ‘mesh’ with each others’ personalities.”

A BBS should maintain some sort of “freshness” to keep the users interested. “A board has to change all the time. One thing I hate is logging onto a BBS and seeing a Logon Message from last year. Users want to feel like things are changing. Users want new, innovative, fresh ideas. Freshness is not only to update a BBS, but to have something that no other board has,” says Fast Frankie.

Far Side adds an interesting note, “Devoting the sysop’s time and keeping the BBS up to date in materials is the formula to success.” That is very true; I have seen many boards go down because the sysop was fed up with his users, hardware, the phone company, the BBS software, etc.

Another very important factor, if not the most important, are the BBS’s users. Here’s what the Buzzard had to say, “The Secret to a Great BBS is great users. I have the best callers in the country. They post conscientiously, and they upload constantly.”

“Users are really important. Without them I’m nothing! They like the board and promote the board to their friends on other systems and people call from all over and say so-and-so sent me and that’s cool. After all, this BBS and many like it are not in the public domain, they’re invite only and the user must have references or be a good user on another BBS somewhere where I may call,” says Capn Crook. And Mr.T says, “Don’t consider yourself as the king of your kingdom, you don’t have the power — the users do.”

And the last factor, but certainly not the least, is to have fun. “I guess the whole point of running a BBS is to have a hell of a good time, meet helloads of people, talk about many issues, and distribute software!” says the Terrorist. “Have fun on

your BBS and everythin' will go smoothly," says Mr.T.

I guess Fast Frankie sums up the whole idea of a BBS best. So this is what I'll conclude with, "The main thing to remember when running a BBS is to have fun. It sounds simple enough, but trust me, many sysops give up on running a board after just a few months.

It is hard work. It is a lot of time. And it is definitely a lot of MONEY. If a sysop no longer has fun running his or her board, then that board has no chance of ever being good or popular again. I have been lucky. I enjoy running a BBS. I have run Mac Masters for the past four years. It may not be the best board in the country, but a lot of users have come through my electronic doors, and they have enjoyed their stay. That's what a Bulletin Board System is all about."