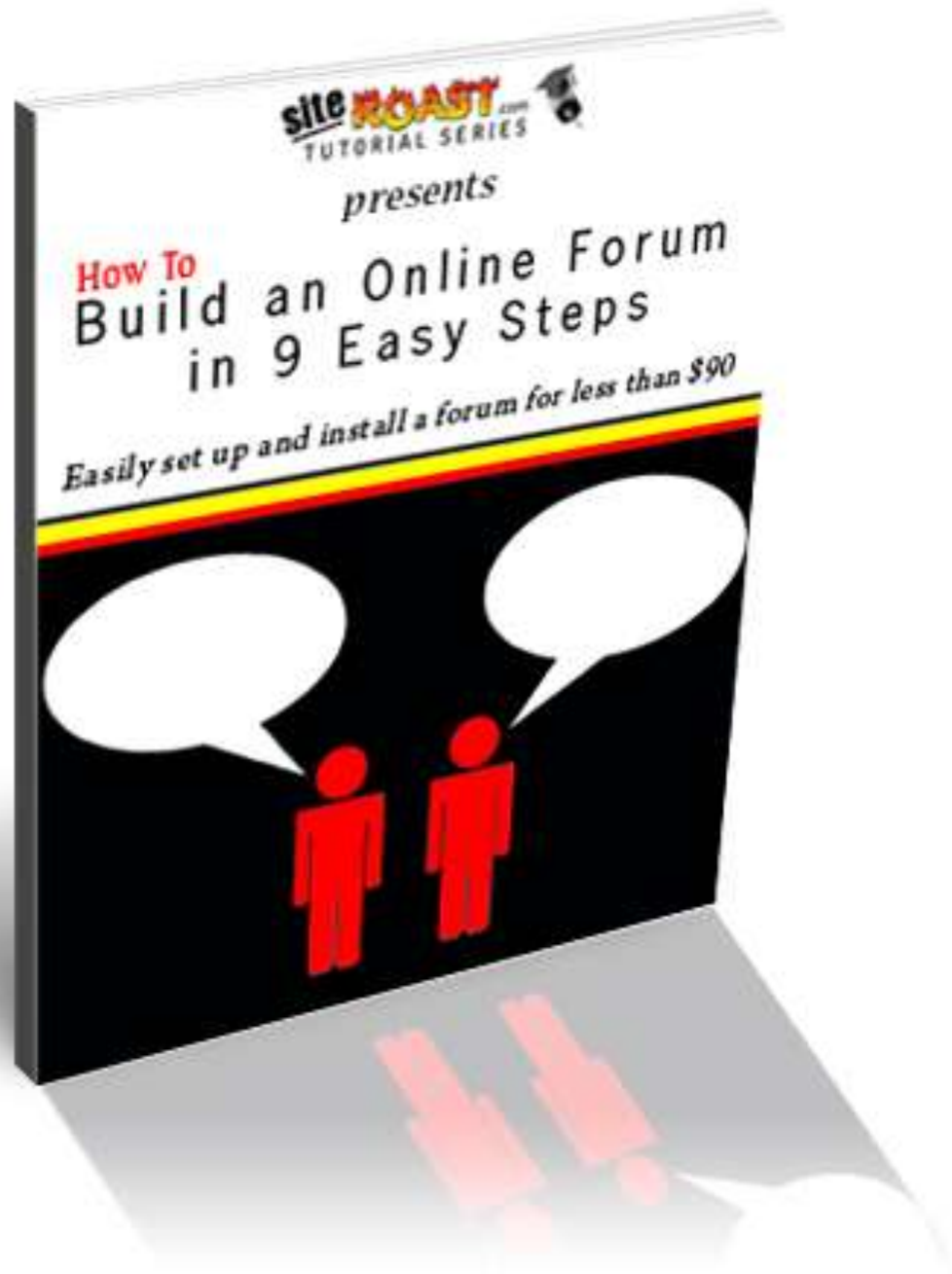




By RJ Licata

A SiteRoast.com Product

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THE SITEROAST.com TUTORIAL SERIES

This ebook is the first product in the SiteRoast.com Tutorial Series.



The goal of the series is to simplify the internet and make advanced tasks easy to understand and implement, no matter your current abilities.

If you're able to use a word processor, email application, and have ever purchased something over the internet, you should be able to follow any of the guides in the SiteRoast.com Tutorial Series.

In the future, updates for this product as well as new educational ebooks will be available at SiteRoast.com. Please check in often for new products and updates.

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ABOUT THIS EBOOK

Have you ever wished you had stayed more in touch with your friends from high school or college?

Do you have memories that you don't want to forget, from times spent with people you just don't have enough time to talk to on a regular basis anymore?

Did you ever find yourself thinking "These social networking sites are great, but they're just too...too public"?

If any of those questions above sound familiar to you, you're in luck. This ebook is your answer to all those problems and more.

In these pages you'll learn the nine easy steps to creating an online forum for you and your friends to stay in touch and remember the glory days.

And it doesn't have to just be for your friends. The topic of the forum is up to you. If you want to talk about a hobby or anything else, these steps will apply to you as well.

All you need to build your own forum and is an internet connection, beginner to moderate computer skills and the ability to follow directions. The ebook will do the rest.

So if you're ready to get started kick off your shoes, sit down in your favorite chair, and start reading.

You (and your friends) will be glad you did.

INTRODUCTION

In October of 2008, I had an idea. It wasn't any huge, change the course of history idea, but it did improve the relationships my friends and I share. And it's proven to be extremely useful and entertaining since.

It all started because of a photo one of my brother's friends posted on Facebook. The picture was taken more than ten years before and was long forgotten until he uploaded it. It was a simple picture of a group of them dressed in their Halloween costumes, about to go trick-or-treating.

Needless to say, a lot of people had something to say about the photo and before long over 200 comments were posted. At first they were about the picture itself, poking fun at one another, but then the discussion veered off and became a series of "remember whens".

Growing up my brother's circle of friends and my own were very intertwined and the conversation quickly gained steam within both groups. It was around the 180th comment that I started to think we needed something more sophisticated if we were going to continue our discussion.

So I thought about looking into how difficult and expensive it would be to create a forum. I figured this way our topics could be categorized neatly and in theory the talks could continue on forever. My biggest concerns were that it would be much too technical for me to figure out or that it would be very expensive for the software/programming to have it built.

I held my breath and headed off to Google, hoping for the best and expecting the worst.

What I found was shocking.

Not only was it very simple to install forum software, but there were high quality forum software programs available for FREE!

Yes, you read that correctly. The forum software I found was 100% free and could be installed with only one click of a button. Now my friends and I could continue living the glory days!

I know what you're thinking. If this software is 100% free, why is this ebook titled "Easily Set Up and Install a Forum for Less Than \$90"?

You're probably wondering, "What's the catch?"

The truth is there is no catch. The forum software *is* free, but there are a couple minor expenses that go with creating any website.

These expenses are mandatory charges for owning a domain name and a web hosting account. If you want complete control over your website there's no getting around them.

Still, for an entire year's worth of laughs and communication with your buddies, \$90 is a bargain. If you want, you can always take up a collection and split the total among everyone who uses the site. That way it will only cost a few bucks per person for the year.

Plus, later on in this ebook I'll show you a couple ways you can use the forum to earn some money and help cover its costs. Using these methods, it's very possible you can earn enough to pay for the site's yearly expenses and maybe have some left over.

Not a bad deal, huh?

SOUNDS GREAT. WHERE DO I SIGN UP?

Whoa, easy there slugger. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. There are a few steps we need to take before we're ready to start. I've outlined the process on the next page.

Although it's best if you start from the beginning and follow each step as I outline, some of you may already be at a different starting point than others.

If that's the case for you, feel free to skip ahead and start at the appropriate place for your situation.

For everyone else, here's the outline this ebook will follow:

1. Choose a Forum Topic
2. Choose a Domain Name and Forum Name
3. Set Up a Hosting Account
4. Install Forum Software
5. Configure Forum Settings and Permissions
6. Upload Forum Themes and Mods
7. Monetize Your Forum (Optional)
8. Create Forum Categories and Boards
9. Spread the Word

And that's it! In nine easy steps you'll have a high quality, self maintaining forum.

Depending on how quickly you make decisions this entire process can be completed in less than one hour, and as you'll see when finished, the benefits are well worth it!

Alright enough wasting time, let's get to work. Off we go to Step 1.

STEP 1. CHOOSE A FORUM TOPIC

In my situation choosing a forum topic was simple. It was going to be a place for all my friends to stay in touch, bust chops, and debate movies and video games.

Like I said before, the idea kind of created itself and finally the light bulb went on for me.

We needed a forum!

So, for us the topic was in place from the very beginning.

For many of you reading this, creating the same type of forum for your friends might sound like fun. I can tell you from my own experience that it's been a blast.

It's important to note that only the first forum costs nearly \$90.

After you have one, each thereafter is only \$10 per year. This is explained further in Step 3.

If you maintain some sort of contact with a group of friends from your childhood, high school, or college years, this type of forum is an awesome thing to do. It's great fun, and it re-builds the camaraderie.

Even still, don't limit yourself there. There are dozens of other directions you can go and there's no limit to the amount of forums you

can build. The only restrictions are time (which is one resource we cannot create more of) and your imagination. Be creative!

With that said, I highly recommend that you limit the forum building to one at a time, at least until you get comfortable with the procedure. This way you don't become confused or distracted during the process. That only leads to frustration and giving up and we don't want that.

Ok, I'm off my soap box. Let's get back to choosing a forum topic.

We've already mentioned the "childhood friends reminiscence" topic. If you'd like to do the same thing, then go right ahead and move on to Step 2.

If that's not really a priority for you, then you need to come up with something else. I've put together a generalized list of some possibilities to help get you thinking. They're very basic, so it's your job to make the suggestions applicable to you.

Your forum could be about:

1. Any hobbies or recreational activities you might have.
2. Any clubs or associations you belong to that might benefit from allowing member contact between meetings.
3. Keeping your family in touch between holidays.
4. Neighborhood, school or community news.
5. Popular TV shows.
6. Informational Q & A.
7. Connecting with people like you (i.e. single moms, military veterans, etc.).

There are hundreds of possibilities for forum topics. If you didn't have any ideas before, I hope reading this list sparked a few.

IMPORTANT >> Before we go on, I want to make something clear. Unless you're already in contact with some people (approximately 10-20 or more) who you know would find the forum useful, be prepared to have some difficulty getting the forum off the ground.

I had a great response to the forum I started for my friends because they had already shown interest in communicating over the internet and I was confident they would want to participate.

And they did.

After the first hour of the site being live, there were over 15 members and 100 posts!

Just through word of mouth!

Finding people whom you don't already know and convincing them to participate on a forum that is pretty empty isn't as easy. It can be done, and shouldn't be a reason why you don't continue, but just keep in mind that it might not take off in the first week or maybe even month of being published.

There are strategies for building forum content and you'll learn about some of them in step 9. You should also be able to find other ideas by searching the web.

I'm assuming you've decided on a topic by now, and if you haven't, make sure you do before moving on. It's absolutely necessary that you know your topic before you start Step 2.

STEP 2. CHOOSE A DOMAIN AND FORUM NAME

Naming your forum and deciding on a domain name are critical steps. In case you don't know, a domain name is the part of the website address that differentiates one site from another.

For instance, in this case – <http://www.siteroast.com> – siteroast.com is the domain name. Only one person, business or organization can own a domain name.

In other words, each domain is unique. Changing one word, letter or symbol will take you to a completely different website.

When choosing a domain name, I suggest you pick one that is significant to the forum topic you've chosen. It doesn't have to be this way, especially if you're building the forum for a select group, but it just makes sense.

For example, if your forum is going to be a place for you and your college buddies to trash talk, you might want to include the name of the bar you all hung out at or your school's mascot in the domain. It's logical and it keeps people interested.

The forum name can be anything you want, but if possible it should be the same as your domain name. This way it's easy for people to remember and it maintains continuity.

Sometimes, due to availability and simplicity, the domain name will have to be slightly different than the forum name. That's ok.

The goal is to have a domain name that is easy to spell and remember. Try to keep it to four words or less, preferably less.

Just above I touched on the fact that all domain names must be original and no two sites can have the same domain. Because of this, there's no guarantee the domain you want will be available.

To find out what's already taken and what's still available you'll have to test them. I'll explain how to do this in a moment. But before we do that, take out a notepad and start brainstorming ideas for your forum and domain names.

Remember, the forum name can be anything you want, but the domain cannot be the same as another site.

Once you've got a list of about 15-20 possible names, then we can begin testing to see what's available. To test domain availability I've always gone to www.Register.com.

The only reason I use Register.com is because I like their interface. I don't use them for any web hosting services and I've never bought a domain name through them, mostly because they charge more and offer less than the hosting provider I use.

We'll get to more on that later.

For now, go to www.Register.com and start typing in your potential domain names. Take a look at the figure below to see what I mean.

The screenshot shows the Register.com homepage. At the top, the logo "register.com" is displayed with the tagline "DON'T JUST MAKE A WEBSITE, MAKE AN IMPACT." To the right, it says "Experience the difference great service can make" and "Call us toll free at 1-877-731-4451". Below this is a navigation bar with links: HOME, DOMAINS, EMAIL, WEB SITES, HOSTING, ECOMMERCE, MARKETING, YOUR BUSINESS, MY ACCOUNT, LOGIN, VIEW CART, CUSTOMER SUPPORT, FAQs, WHOIS. The main content area features the text "SIMPLICITY, SECURITY + CONVENIENCE. Come see why small-businesses prefer Register.com." and a "Log In" button. A large banner image shows a man talking on a phone. Overlaid on the banner is a red handwritten word "Domain" with an arrow pointing to a search box. The search box contains the text "www." followed by a text input field, ".com" in a dropdown menu, and a "Search For A Name" button. Below the search box, it says "Advanced Domain Name Search Help Me Choose a Web Site".

Put your domain ideas in the text box one at a time and press **'enter'** or click the "search for a name" box.

Make sure there are no spaces between the words in your domain name. If you would like a space (which I don't recommend) you may use a hyphen.

Notice also that there is already a .com added to the end of the form and a www. added to the front. You DO NOT have to put them in the first box.

So if we're going to check the availability of the domain www.testdomain.com, you could just write "testdomain" (without quotes) in the box the red arrow is pointing to. Then make sure the suffix is .com or whichever suffix you prefer and press **'enter'**.

When you enter the first name, Register.com brings you to a new page which lets you know if the name you tried is available or not. Below you can see what happened when I checked the availability of www.testdomain.com.

YOUR DOMAIN NAME OPTIONS

testdomain.com is not available. → **CRAP!**

Choose from the following options below:

A Choose from the alternative domain names below:

B Search Again Tip

.com 

[Advanced Domain Name Search](#)

Search Again

C Make an Offer on **testdomain.com**

Make an Offer

Domain Name	Price	Type	Action
☐ testdomain.tv	\$50.00	Available	Add To Cart
☐ ManagementDomain.com	\$649.00	Premium	Add To Cart
TestTest.com	\$30800.00	Premium	Please Call
☐ EditingDomain.com	\$449.00	Premium	Add To Cart
TestingWorld.com	\$4588.00	Premium	Please Call
FantasyDomain.com	\$4950.00	Premium	Please Call
☐ TestAccessories.com	\$1000.00	Premium	Add To Cart
DomainTutorials.com	\$4750.00	Premium	Please Call
TestaPi.com	\$2688.00	Premium	Please Call

At the top you'll notice my frustration because the domain name I tried was already taken. Of course I didn't really want to purchase testdomain.com but there will probably be a few of your ideas that are already taken as well.

So since the name you entered was not available continue on down your list until you find one that is. When you find one put a star next to it and keep going until you've checked all your ideas.

To save some time you can enter the next domain try in the text box on that same page (under the 'B' in the blue circle) and hit '**Search Again**'. Register.com will report back again with that domain's status.

After you've gone through your list and starred the domains that are available you need to choose the one you like best. Make your decision carefully because changing it later on is much more trouble than you want to deal with.

When you decide on one you like move on to Step 3.

STEP 3. SETUP A HOSTING ACCOUNT

Ok, you've decided on a forum topic and picked out a name. You've found a domain that's available.

What's next?

Now it's time to setup your hosting account. Setting up hosting is quick and easy, but unfortunately this is the part where you'll have to go into your pockets. Not too deep though, in fact not deep at all, and the benefits are well worth it.

The hosting service I use, and the one I highly recommend, is [Host Monster](#). It costs \$6.95 per month or \$83.40 per year (before tax). However, as I'm writing this [Host Monster](#) is currently offering a year of hosting for only \$5.95/month or \$71.40/year.



The screenshot shows the HostMonster website homepage. At the top, there is a green header with the HostMonster logo (a stylized 'hm' in blue and green). To the right of the logo is a gold seal that says 'WORLD 24/7 SUPPORT CLASS'. Further right, it says 'NOW HOSTING 600,000 DOMAINS'. On the far right of the header are input fields for 'Domain:' and 'Password:', and a link for 'Control Panel Login'. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: Home, Hosting Features, Help Center, Contact Us, About Us, Domain Check, and Affiliates. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled 'Web Hosting Plans Include:' and lists various features: UNLIMITED Hosting Space, UNLIMITED Site Bandwidth, Host UNLIMITED Domains, Unlimited Pop/Imap Email Accounts, SSH Access (Secure Shell), SSL, FTP, Stats, CGI, Ruby (RoR), Perl, PHP, MYSQL, Front Page Extensions, Free Domain Forever, Free Site Builder, and Best Support in the Industry. Below this list is a 'Demo Login' button. The right column is titled 'Professional Web Hosting' and features a large image of a smiling woman with blonde hair sitting at a desk with a laptop. Overlaid on the image is text that says 'for \$6.95/month \$5.95/month Special Promo'. Below the image, it lists 'Free Set-up', 'No Hidden Fees', and 'Domain Included!'. At the bottom of the right column is a large red button that says 'Sign Up Now'.

You can't beat those prices, especially for the services that [Host Monster](#) provides.

Which brings me to my next point – [Host Monster](#) offers many features that are useful when building forums.

Here are some of the features that are of value to us:

- Unlimited Web Hosting Space
- Unlimited Bandwidth
- First Domain Name Free
- Host Unlimited Domains
- 100 MySQL Databases
- Simple Scripts and Fantastico Support

I'll take a minute to explain in case you're wondering what all that means.

Simply put, for \$6.95 per month (or [\\$5.95 if you're quick enough](#)) you can get an unlimited amount of server space and bandwidth. This is good because as your forum's size and traffic grows you won't have to worry about crashing the server or being charged for going over your limits.

Another point worth mentioning is that the package comes with your first domain name free. So, if you're only building one forum, and you get the discounted price, you'll be up and running for \$71.40, plus tax. Normally domains cost \$10/year.

However, if you decide you want to build another forum or start a website or blog, your account also allows for unlimited domain hosting. This means that you can host as many additional sites as you want on that one hosting account and your monthly fee won't change. You'll only have to pay to register the new domains.

The last point I want to mention is the 100 MySQL databases that [Host Monster](#) provides each account. Each forum installation requires us to use one MySQL database. So, in theory, each [Host Monster](#) hosting account can support up to 100 forums before you run out of databases. For most users that's plenty.

To make things easier, [Host Monster](#) comes with two tools that allow for one-touch forum installations. One of them, called Fantastico, is no longer recommended by HostMonster, so I won't get into explaining how it works.

The other option, called Simple Scripts is a wizard that allows users to easily install a number of software programs with the touch of a button. It's really an awesome tool, which saves hours of trying to figure out what file gets installed where.

In the next step you'll learn more about using Simple Scripts to install your forum.

STEP 4. INSTALL FORUM SOFTWARE

When you log into your [Host Monster](#) account you'll be redirected to the cPanel interface. There you'll have access to all the back end features you get with your hosting account.

This is what the cPanel looks like:



On the right side are all the tools and scripts that are made available for you to use on your website. For what we need to install our forum we're going to scroll down to the Software/Services section near the bottom of the page.

There you'll find the links to both the Simple Scripts and Fantastico wizards. Like I said before we're going to ignore Fantastico because [Host Monster](#) now recommends we use Simple Scripts.

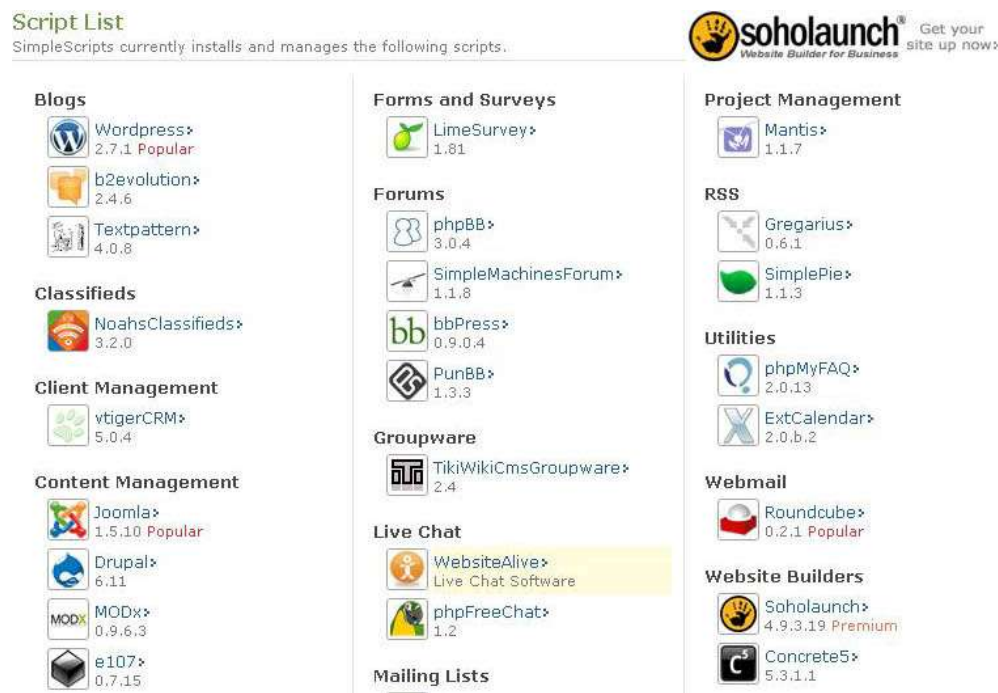


You're probably wondering why I continue to mention Fantastico if we won't be using it. My reason for that is to make you aware of alternate methods. Fantastico will still work, but Simple Scripts is more secure and releases updates more frequently.

USING SIMPLE SCRIPTS

When you click on the Simple Scripts icon you're brought to a page that lists all the programs that are available through the installation wizard.

It should look something like this:



As you can see there are a variety of programs that can help you add some really cool features to the websites in your hosting account.

I know we're not concerned with those right now, but one of the things I really like about [Host Monster](#) is how easy they make it for you to create some top quality sites with very powerful functionality.

To install our forum we're going to use the script called Simple Machines Forum (SMF) which is in the middle column under "forums".

Forums



phpBB is an excellent program as well, and you'll get similar results using it, but Simple Machines Forum is the one I use and prefer.

If you click on '**Simple Machines Forum**' you'll go to the SMF details page. There you'll get a short summary as well as some screenshots of SMF in action.

Also at the very bottom of that page is the installation link. You can see what that page will look like below.



SimpleMachinesForum

Simple Machines Forum - SMF in short - is a free, professional grade software package that allows you to set up your own online community within minutes.

Its powerful custom made template engine puts you in full control of the lay-out of your message board and with our unique SSI - or Server Side Includes - function you can let your forum and your website interact with each other.

SMF is written in the popular language PHP and uses a MySQL database. It is designed to provide you with all the features you need from a bulletin board while having an absolute minimal impact on the resources of the server. SMF is the next generation of forum software - and best of all it is and will always remain completely free!

License Information

SimpleMachinesForum is released under the [SMF](#) license.

Current Version

v1.1.8, released 17 February 2009

[View All Available Versions](#)

External Links

[Official Site](#)

[Documentation](#)

Installation Options

[Install on an Existing Server](#)

Using



(You'll be able to choose your options on the next screen.)

Magic Button

[Back to the Script List](#)

Screenshots



Front Page

[Click to Enlarge](#)



Managing Members

[Click to Enlarge](#)

What I referred to as the “Magic Button” is the one-touch installation that I’ve been praising Simple Scripts for. In reality it’s a two-touch installation, but it’s still pretty darn easy.

Clicking the ‘**Install Now**’ button will bring us to the installation options page. Here we’ll decide all the settings for how our forum will be installed on the server.

To be clear, when I refer to the server I’m talking about the location our hosting account is stored on.

There are a couple questions you’ll need to answer on the installation page. The first is which version you want to install. I second Simple Script’s recommendation to choose the latest version.

The second question is which directory you want Simple Scripts to be installed on. This decision is entirely up to you, depending on your plans for the site.

General Configuration

What version of SimpleMachinesForum would you like to install?

It is highly recommended to choose the latest version to ensure your website's security and enable the latest features.

1.1.8 (Stable) ▼

← Most recent

Where would you like SimpleMachinesForum installed?

http://www.siteroast.com



/ test-forum

Access URL: <http://www.siteroast.com/test-forum>

This is the URL your visitors will type in to view your site.

For example, if you plan to make the website a forum and a forum only, and keep it that way, you can leave the directory box empty. This will install the forum in your root directory.

However, if you plan to have the forum be just one part of the whole website, I recommend installing it in a separate directory such as “forums”. To do this simply write “forums” in the text box following the ‘ / ’ symbol.

For demonstration purposes I chose to install the forum on SiteRoast.com in the “test-forum” directory. That means that if this were a real installation, visitors would be able to access my forum by going to the following address (my Access URL):

<http://www.SiteRoast.com/test-forum>

You can see your Access URL in blue text below the second question. If you set up your forum as I have recommended your Access URL would look something like this:

<http://www.YourSite.com/forums>

Important >>Remember your Access URL because you’ll need it later to find your forum on the web.

And voila! You don’t have to do anything more to create the directory. That’s the beauty of Simple Scripts.

Once you fill out the text box with your choice for a directory name, Simple Scripts will go into your hosting account and create the directory for you.

ADDITIONAL CONFIGURATION OPTIONS

Before you're ready to finalize the SMF installation there's two more options to configure. Under the "Additional Options" heading are two check-boxes. They are both checked by default.

Additional Options

Advanced Configuration

☒ Generate me an Administrator Login

If this box is checked, we will create a random administrator username and password for you.

☒ Automatically create a new database.

If this box is checked, we will attempt to create a new database for you.

Server Requirements

Your server meets all the minimum system requirements for SimpleMachinesForum. »

Click the above link if you're curious about which server requirements this script utilizes.

We want to uncheck the first box labeled '**Generate me an Administrator Login**'. The second box we leave checked.

When you uncheck the first box nothing happens, but if you click the mouse again somewhere else on the screen a menu drops down that looks like the image below.

Additional Options

Advanced Configuration

☐ Generate me an Administrator Login

If this box is checked, we will create a random administrator username and password for you.

Admin Username

New Password

Confirm Password

☒ Automatically create a new database.

If this box is checked, we will attempt to create a new database for you.

} Log in
info

The area highlighted so artistically in red is where you will create your forum administrator account. This is the username and password that you will use to login to the backend of your forum.

Make sure it's something you'll remember, but is strong enough to keep from being hacked.

We're just about ready to complete the SMF installation, but before we do make sure you have the following information written down:

1. **Your Access URL**
2. **Your Admin Username**
3. **Your Admin Password**

Once that's taken care of, select the two checkboxes under "Legal Information" agreeing to the Simple Machines Forum Terms and Conditions and Terms of Service.

You should probably read them as well, but something tells me not many people do.

Ok, now we're ready hit button two of the "two-click installation". At the bottom of the screen is a big green button that says **'Complete'**.

When you click it Simple Scripts will go through a quick installation process and you'll end up at a screen that looks something like this:

Your SimpleMachinesForum installation has completed successfully.

Access Information

You may want to copy and/or print this page for your records. It has been emailed to [REDACTED] for your reference.

Website URL <http://www.siteroast.com/test-forum>

Admin URL <http://www.siteroast.com/test-forum/index.php?action=login>

Username: [REDACTED]

Password: [REDACTED]

We highly recommend changing your password after logging in for the first time.

Support Options

Please note that HostMonster can only support the installation, upgrade, and removal processes of SimpleMachinesForum. Support for SimpleMachinesForum can be obtained directly through SimpleMachinesForum at <http://www.simplemachines.org>.

This page will have all your Access Information and it will also be emailed to the address you used when setting up your [Host Monster](#) account.

And there you have it. Your very own forum is installed and ready to be configured.

Don't believe me?

Click on the Website URL from the above image and you'll be brought directly to your new forum.

We're almost finished but there are still a few more things that need to happen before you can build an online community.

Move on to Step 5 to learn how to configure your forum settings and permissions.

STEP 5. CONFIGURE FORUM SETTINGS & PERMISSIONS

Did you check out the forum yet? How did it look? Don't worry if it looks a little plain. There are ways we can spice it up and I'll show you some options later on in step 6.

For now, go to the forum home page if you aren't there already. If you've seen forums before this should look kind of familiar. It's your typical forum except it's very, very empty.

In fact, there's only one post. That's ok though, you will be able to start building some content very soon.

Before you can do that we need to configure the user permissions and the forum settings.

It's the boring stuff, I know, but the decisions you make in this step will affect how your forum is run in the future. It's important, so try to bear with me.

FORUM SETTINGS

First, login to the forum using the Username and Password you chose with Simple Scripts.

The login box is in the top left corner of your forum home page and looks like this:



Welcome, **Guest**. Please login or register.

Forever

Login with username, password and session length.

Once you're logged in you'll notice that there's a new tab called '**Admin**' just underneath the login box.



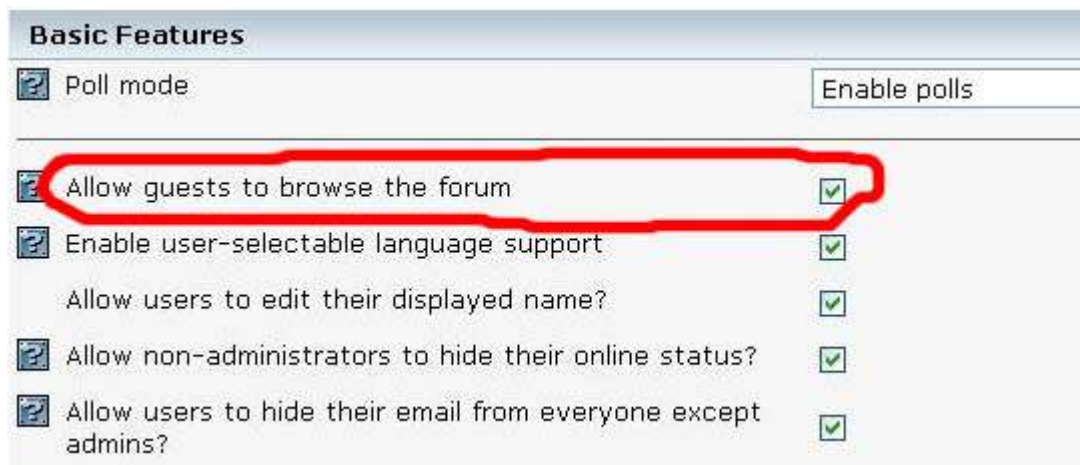
Click that and you will see a page called the **'Administration Center'**. There you will see a list of settings categories and the left sidebar has even more.

If you click on **'Features and Options'** you'll see the list of **'Basic Features'**. The settings you choose under this category are up to you and depend on your personal preference.

Simple Machines Forum is pretty good "out of the box", meaning its default settings are suitable for most people and you can get it up and running quickly.

However, there is one important setting that is worth mentioning here.

When I started the forum for my friends and me I changed the first box under the **'Basic Features'** tab. It comes checked by default, so I unchecked it.



The option to allow guests to browse the forum is what I'm talking about.

For most new forums this box should stay checked, allowing unregistered visitors to browse the forum. This will increase participation.

However, my forum was meant to be a private place for my buddies and me to goof off. It is an invitation only group where you must be logged in to view posts and I have to approve anyone who wishes to register.

This allows our conversations to remain private, which is probably a good thing!

If your forum is going to be similar in nature to mine and you'd like it to remain among a select group of people, be sure to uncheck the option circled above.

That's really the only setting you need to be aware of right off the bat. All the others depend on your personal preferences and you can't really go wrong either way.

USER PERMISSIONS

Like the features and options settings, most of the user permissions settings are fine out of the box.

As time goes on you may want to solicit volunteers to act as moderators for particular topics. When that time comes you can adjust the levels of authorization each one has by clicking **'Permissions'** which is located under the members heading on the left sidebar.



The more authority you give them, the less overseeing you'll have to do. Be careful though, if your friends are anything like mine giving too much authority means you'll sign on one day and the color scheme will be pink and purple and the passwords will all be changed.

Not that there's anything wrong with pink and purple. It's just not my style.

Moving on...when you get into the permissions screen there are a number of different options you have. Many more than we have the time to get into.

In a nutshell, you can give specific users a range of permissions which will allow them to perform different forum functions.

If you ever get don't understand something, click on the nearest question mark – they look like this:  or this: (?). They will bring up a small help menu and hopefully explain things a little bit better.

We've covered the crucial settings and permissions, but before we move on to step 6 browse around the rest of the options and set the forum up how you like.

STEP 6. UPLOAD FORUM THEMES & MODS

Earlier we talked about how ugly the default forum was. Well luckily SMF is a user driven software and there are plenty of generous folks who take the time to create some very cool forum customizations. Then give them away for free!

If you go to the Simple Machines Forum homepage at <http://www.simplemachines.org> you will see some icons on the right side of the page. Choose **'Customize'**.



The next page has three larger icons. They are **'Modifications'**, **'Themes'**, and **'Upgrades'**. We don't need to worry about the **'Upgrades'** option right now since we just installed the most recent version of SMF.



Modifications

In our Modification Site — commonly called the "Mod Site" — you will find operation, add features, remove features, and a lot of other possibilities.



Themes

In our theme site you will find themes created by some very talented users. You can find themes ranging from highly professional to inbetween.



Upgrades

In our Upgrades Site you will find instructions on how to manually upgrade your forum. These are available through Simple Machines Forum's Package Manager.

INSTALLING A NEW THEME

The first thing we want to do is select a new theme. You can do this by clicking on the **'Themes'** icon. There you'll be given links to the different theme categories. Within each category will be a list of the themes that are available for download.

Each theme has some information and download statistics. Just about all of them have a screen shot as well. When you find one you like, click on the name or the screenshot and you'll be brought to that theme's download page.

On the right side of the download page you'll see the words "Download this theme" and directly below that will be a download link. Click on the link and choose **'Save'**. Save the zipped file to your desktop. It will ask you if you want to open the file. Select **'Close'**.

Now you've got a zipped folder saved onto your computer. What's nice about SMF is it allows you to upload your theme in a zipped folder, which saves a few steps and makes things very easy.

Go back to your forum and under the **'Admin'** tab choose **'Themes and Layout'**.

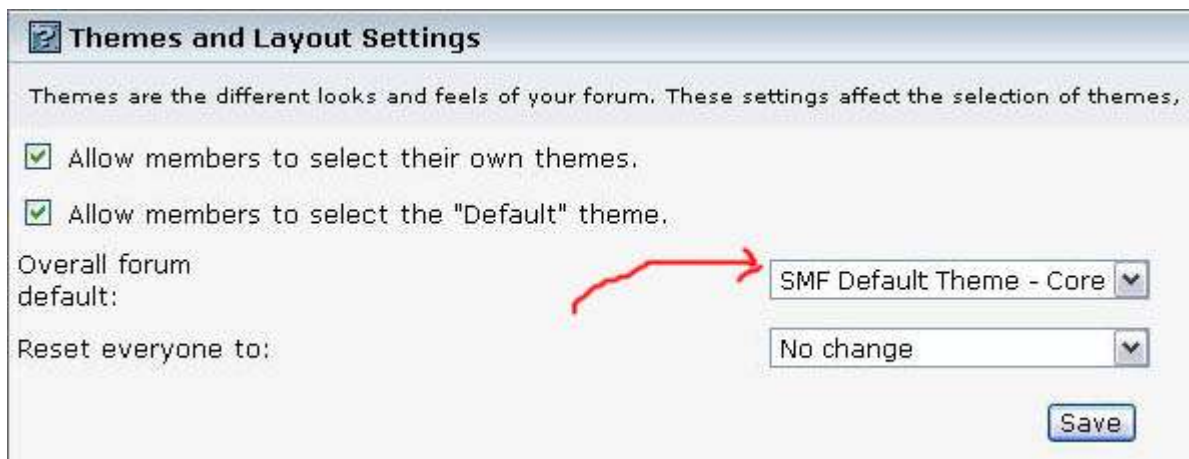
On that screen we want to scroll down to the bottom where it says "Install a New Theme".

Click **'Browse'** and find the zipped theme file you just saved to the desktop. Click **'Open'** and the file will show up in the text box next to the **'Browse'** button.

Hit **'Install'** and SMF will ask if you want to install a new theme. Choose **'OK'**.

Wait a few seconds while SMF uploads the files. When it's finished it will take you to a screen that says the new theme was installed successfully.

At this point you probably won't notice any difference, but if you click on the **'Manage and Install'** sub-tab you'll be back to the "Themes and Layout" page. This time click on the **'Overall Forum Default'** dropdown menu. You should see your new theme listed there. Select it and hit **'Save'**. See the image below if I've confused you.



Now there should be a change in how your forum looks. If everything worked

properly it will look like the theme you downloaded.

INSTALLING MODIFICATIONS

SMF modifications, or “mods”, make it easy to add advanced features to your forum. There are mods for just about anything you can think of and new ones are always being created by the awesome Single Machines Forum community.

To browse through the mods that are available go back to the SMF customize page and select **‘Modifications’**. You can also visit the SMF Mods page by clicking on this link: <http://custom.simplemachines.org/mods/>

One of the first mods I installed on the forum I made was the [Ad Management mod](#). This made it easy for me to put advertisements on the forum and I earned enough for the forum to pay for itself for the first year within the first month of having it up.

Not a bad deal!

I’ll explain more about monetizing your forum in step 7, so for now let’s just focus on explaining how to upload mods.

When you find a mod you want to install on your forum click on it to go to its download page. On the right side of that page there is a heading that says “Download this mod”. Below that is a link to a zip-file. Click the link and save to the desktop. It will ask you if you want to open the file. Select **‘Close’**.

Now to install the mod on your forum.

For some reason SMF mods are called mods when you download them, but when you go to install them on your forum’s admin page they become packages. It can be a bit confusing.

If you go back to your forum and click the **‘Admin’** tab on the main header, you’ll see the sidebar menu. Under the “Main” heading is a link called **‘Packages’**

Click that and you'll go to the Package Manager. This will show you all the packages (or mods) you have uploaded and installed.

Within the Package Manager are four tabs. Click on the second one called **'Download Packages'**.

At the bottom of that page is a place to upload a package. Click the browse button and find the zipped mod file you just saved to the desktop. Open it and then click the upload button on the Package Manager page.

You should see a message that the package was downloaded successfully.

Next click on the first Package Manager tab, the one called **'Browse Packages'**. At the bottom you should see your recently uploaded package listed. Click the **'Apply Mod'** link located at the far right of the screen. Now click the **'Install Now'** button on the bottom right of the page.

Your mod should now be installed and active. Each mod is different but somewhere in your Admin settings you should see options for this and any other mod you have installed on your forum.

Simple Machines Forum has excellent support and documentation on performing this and all other SMF tasks. Visit the [SMF home page](#) for more extensive help.

By now hopefully you're getting the idea just how powerful and flexible SMF is. You can add as many mods as you find useful for your forum and if you so desire you can change your theme as often as you like.

That about covers the forum customization step. Next, in step 7, I'm going to go over how you can easily monetize your forum. There's nothing wrong with having your fun and making some extra cash, too. ; -)

STEP 7. MONETIZE YOUR FORUM (OPTIONAL)

Like it says in the section heading, this step is completely optional. Some people don't want to earn money from their forums or websites and that's ok. I'm not quite sure why anyone would pass on an opportunity for free money, but to each their own.

If you're interested in ways your forum can earn you extra dough, continue reading this section. But if money's not really your thing and you want to continue on with your forum building and fund the entire thing out of pocket, go ahead and skip on to step 8.

In case you sense a little sarcasm in my writing you should know I meant to sound that way. No matter the purpose or topic of your forum, you are spending your time and energy to read through this ebook and build it.

If you don't at least try to monetize it, all you get is some intrinsic value and maybe a few pats on the back from your buddies. Good stuff, sure, but you're still out 83 bucks.

Why not try to leverage your work and your friends' interest in your work into at least enough money to cover expenses. Like I said, my forum paid for itself within the first couple months. Now what we've got is 100% free fun online.

You probably won't get rich from this. In fact, my situation may have been a fluke. You may not make any money at all. I make no guarantees, no promises, that any of what I'm about to outline will work.

However, the methods I'm going to talk about *have* worked for me on my forum and/or on other more traditional websites as well. At the very least they're worth your consideration.

Ok, let's get back on track.

If you've read this far, that means you want to know more about how you can monetize your forum. There are a few ways you can do this, and each is really quite simple.

I'll give a quick explanation of some of my favorites below.

GOOGLE ADSENSE

[Google AdSense](#) is the most popular contextual ad program there is. In fact, it's the only method I used with any success on my forum. I've tried a few others, but because of the nature of my members they just didn't work as well as AdSense.

AdSense is a system where you place code generated by Google on your site which shows advertising relevant to the discussion or content on the forum.

The idea being that someone is more likely to click an ad that is directed at what they're talking about. An obvious assumption is if they're discussing it, they have an interest. If they have an interest they may want to look at other websites related to it.

Every time someone clicks on one of your Google ads money goes into your account. How much depends on the bid made by the advertiser, but they typically tend to pay anywhere from a few cents to a few dollars per click.

Signing up for an account is very easy and if you need any help Google has extensive [support documentation](#).

AFFILIATE ADVERTISING

There are hundreds of possible affiliate programs you can sign up for. An affiliate program is a way for you to earn money by referring your members to buy products and services.

By placing ad code on your forum you'll get credit anytime someone clicks the ad from your site and purchases something on the advertiser's site. Commissions for these referrals depend on the advertiser. Typically they are either a percentage of sales (say 3-10%) or a flat fee (sometimes \$25 or more).

The best advice for using affiliate advertising is to think of a product or service that is the leader in your forum topic's industry and go to their website.

For instance, if your forum is about credit rating and repair you might want to check out the affiliate program for a site like [Equifax](#).

Most big businesses and retailers have some sort of affiliate program already set up. You can usually find a link to it in the footer of their website.

Another way to quickly find the companies affiliate program signup page is to go to Google and search – ['company name' affiliate program]. The first couple results will usually have what you're looking for.

One final way to quickly find affiliate programs to apply for is to go to a website like [Commission Junction](#) or the [Google Affiliate Network](#). You'll find many well-known companies have partnerships with these sites.

Signing up for affiliate programs is completely free and always should be. Never pay to be part of someone's affiliate program. The idea is for you to make them money, not give them yours.

SELLING AD SPACE

Depending on the topic of your forum and the type of members it attracts you might be able to make some money selling advertising space. You can do this however you want but typically ads are sold in week or month long chunks.

The rates and terms are all dependant on what you and the advertiser can agree upon.

This method requires more work from you than the other methods I discussed above. It will also probably work best for forums based on topics that are local or focused on a smaller group. This way you can target small businesses in the neighborhood or industry and approach them about advertising.

If you go this route be sure to have forum statistics available to show how active your forum is. Advertisers like to know their ads will be seen often and by many. You can find most participation statistics right on your forum. If you want more in-depth stats, take a look at [Google Analytics](#).

NOTE> These aren't even close to all the monetization methods available for forums. There are many, many more that may work well for you. If you want to know more about some of the others, Google search "Forum Monetization" and you'll find many helpful tips.

IMPLEMENTING ADS ON YOUR FORUM

Ok, so you've decided which monetization method you want to try. By the way, you can use more than one method if you wish.

But let's say you've decided on one for now. I bet you're wondering how you should go about putting the ads on your forum. Well, it's actually pretty easy.

To begin, search through the mods page until you find one that will help you install ads on your forum or download the SMF [Ad Management mod](#) . It's the one I use and it has worked very well so far.

When you get to the download screen you'll notice many different versions to choose from. I usually choose the latest version, which is normally the last link in the list. If this version doesn't work for some reason try choosing a different one until you find one that does.

Upload and install it to your forum like I explained in step 6. When you've done that successfully click on the '**Admin**' tab and you should see a link called '**Ad**

Management’ in the left sidebar. It will be underneath the “Configuration” heading.

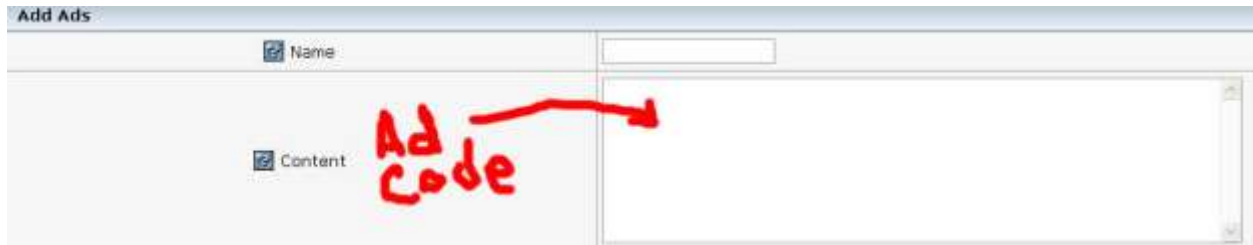


Click on it and you’ll be brought to the Ad Management settings screen. On the sub-tab menu you want to select the **‘Add Ads’** tab, (say that ten times fast) and you’ll see a menu that looks something like the one in the following image.

A screenshot of the "Add Ads" configuration screen. The title "Add Ads" is in the top left. The form is divided into two main sections. The top section has two fields: "Name" with a small icon and a text input box, and "Content" with a small icon and a large text area. The bottom section is a list of checkboxes for ad placement, each with a small icon. The checkboxes are: "Which boards should this ad display in", "Display ads within posts", "Display ads after categories", "Type", "Display ads on every page right below the menu", "Display ads on board index", "Display ads on message index", "Display ads on the post page", "Display ads after the last post", "Display ads on every page on the top of the page", "Display ads in the welcome user area", "Display ads on the bottom of the page", "Display ads on every page as a tower on the left side", and "Display ads on every page as a tower on the right side". To the right of these checkboxes are three text input boxes and a dropdown menu labeled "HTML".

Once you’ve gotten to this point, head back over to whichever ad method you’re using and create the code through the wizard they provide.

When you're finished setting up there will be a place to copy the newly generated ad code. Copy it and go back your forum's Ad Management page. There's a large text box labeled content. Paste the code there.

A screenshot of a web form titled "Add Ads". The form has two main sections: "Name" and "Content". The "Name" section has a small text input field. The "Content" section has a large text area. A red arrow points from the text "Ad code" (written in red) to the "Content" text area. The "Content" text area is empty.

Make sure you remember to press the **'Add'** button in the lower right corner; otherwise none of your changes will be saved.

There are a number of other options available to choose from, such as where you want your ads to show up. For the most part they depend on your personal preferences and what works best for your forum.

Each option is pretty self explanatory, but if you have any questions about what they do, click the  symbol next to the option and it will be explained further.

That's it! You've got the basics of how to monetize your forum. Now not only can you have a rocking place on the web to hang out with your friends and chat, but you can hopefully scoop up some cash as well.

We're almost done, now. Only two more steps to go. These last two are very important though, because they will determine how successful your forum is.

STEP 8. CREATE FORUM CATEGORIES AND BOARDS

I'm assuming at this point at least that you're aware of what a forum is and how it works. Forums are pretty similar across formats, but just to be sure we're on the same page I'll explain the terminology that SMF uses.

THE FORUM STRUCTURE

Forums are set up as hierarchies. There are broad categories that are narrowed down to very specific sections.

The overall structure of the forum can be drilled down like this:

>>Your Forum

>>Categories

>> Boards

>>Topics (or Threads)

>>Posts

It's important to maintain as much organization as possible so your forum doesn't become a confusing mess. You want your members to know exactly where to go to post their thoughts or find what they're looking for.

Depending on the forum settings you decided to use and the permissions you give out, you may have extreme control over the structure or you may have given organizational power to your members.

My suggestion is to give your members only as much control as they need. Anything more than that and you risk having them screw things up if they don't know what they're doing.

In my experience, just enough control means you set up the forum categories and boards and allow them to start topics and post within them.

As an example let's say your forum is about TV shows. Your categories might be TV News, Dramas, Sitcoms, Reality Shows and Cartoons. Then the boards would drill deeper into the categories.

The TV News category might have boards like Actors, Actresses, Studios, Gossip, Upcoming Shows, and so on.

Then the forum members can take it from there. They would start a topic and write a post within it. Then other members read their post and can reply if they choose to do so.

PLAN THE STRUCTURE CAREFULLY

Because forum structure and organization is so important, I suggest you grab a pad and a pencil and list some ideas for subtopics within your forum.

You shouldn't worry just yet about whether they'll be categories or boards. Just put down the general topics you'd like people to discuss on your forum.

Don't pay attention to how many or how few topics you have, just take a few minutes and come up with as many as you can. Then go back through and scratch any duplicates, condense the ones that are similar if you can and put a star next to the broadest terms because these are going to be your categories.

Take all the categories and write them across the page, leaving room beneath each one to add the boards. Then go through the remaining topics and put them under the categories they most logically go with.

Now you've got categories and boards outlined and ready to go.

In my forum I created a board within my general discussion category that asked for suggestions in case any of my friends thought of a new category or board that should be added.

I have opinionated friends and the suggestions haven't stopped coming in since.

I don't want to beat a dead horse, but if I can make one last point about how important structure is to your forum.

In the introduction to this ebook I told the story of how I got the idea to start my forum. As you'll recall it was because of the overwhelming comment response one of my friend's photos got.

If organization didn't matter, we'd still be leaving comments on Facebook. But as the conversation started to shift, things became confusing and there were multiple conversations going on at the same time. It was tough keeping track of who was talking to whom.

A forum became our only option. And I'm so glad we went with it.

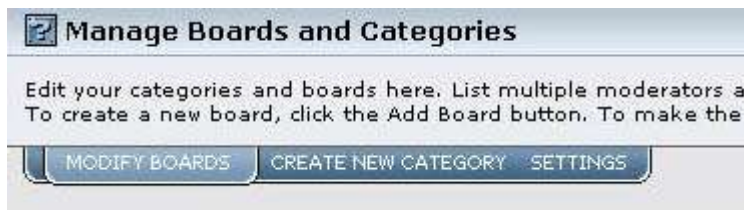
SETTING UP THE STRUCTURE ON YOUR FORUM

Part of the reason I really like Simple Machines Forum is its ease of use. Creating categories and boards is simple as pie.

To begin, make sure you're logged in to your forum user account and click on the **'Admin'** tab.

On the left sidebar, the first link under the Forum heading is **'Boards'**.

Click on it and you'll see three sub tabs: **'Modify Boards'**, **'Create New Category'**, and **'Settings'**.



Click on **'Create New Category'** and type the name of the new category into the text box.

You'll also see a drop down box above the new category name box. This box will let you change the order of your categories. Adjust them to suit your needs.

Repeat this process and continue creating new categories until you've got all that were in your outline.

When you're done with this you should end up at the Modify Boards page, but if you don't, click the **'Modify Boards'** sub tab and you'll see all the categories you just created are there.

There's a small problem though. None of them have any boards yet. On the far right side of this page you'll see a button that says **'Add Board'**. There should be one under every category.

Click the button and beginning adding boards according to the forum outline you created.

The **'Add Boards'** screen gives you more options than the **'Add Categories'** menu. Most of those settings are fine by default and you don't really have to change them, but you can if you'd like.

The most important options are the first three, so I'll take a moment to explain those.

First is a dropdown box so you can choose which category the board should go in. That's rather self-explanatory.

The second option is a box to name the board. Pretty simple as well.

The third and final option we're concerned with is the board description. This is where you can write a short summary of what the board is about. The reason this is important is it makes known to your members what topic you expect the board to stick to, helping you keep posts organized.

Like most of the other menus on the Simple Machines Forum admin backend there are a number of other options available to you. The SMF software is highly customizable and you can arrange it any way you'd like.

I don't have the time or space to explain them all here, but feel free to poke around and test some of them out on your own. If you have trouble the extensive [Simple Machines Documentation](#) should answer many of your questions.

Alright, we're just about there. There's only one step left to do. This one is the most exciting because it calls for you to announce your forum to the world.

I'll explain how to go about spreading the word in step 9.

STEP 9. SPREAD THE WORD

Congratulations! The hard part of building your forum is finished. Now comes the fun stuff. It's time to announce to anyone who will listen that your forum is up and running.

That doesn't mean we're going to run around screaming it to everyone on the street. We want to spread the word in a careful and calculated way. There are a few reasons why we do it this way.

First, we don't want to waste our time with those who won't care anyway. We chose our forum topic with the idea that it would be very useful to those interested in a very specific subject. Not everyone is going to care about it as much as you. And that's ok. We'll focus on the people that will want to know about it.

The second reason is we don't want to be a nuisance to anyone. People like to have their space on the web just like in real life. If we bombard them with news of our forum we may risk turning them off to it before they've even given it a chance. Instead we'll get our message out under control and without pressuring anyone. They'll appreciate you for it.

Finally, we announce the arrival of our forum under control because we might not want everyone to know. Using my forum again as an example, I only wanted those people who I grew up with to know about it. There was no need for someone who couldn't share our memories to be on the forum anyway.

So, keeping those points in mind, start to think about the target audience or participators for your forum topic. Is it a national audience or local? Are you targeting men and women or just one or the other? What is the age group your audience will consist of mostly?

Once you've determined a target membership ask yourself what the best way is to notify them of your new forum. If the forum is like mine, and just for close friends your job is easy. Call three or four, give them the domain and tell them to check it out. Then sit back and let word of mouth work its magic.

If it's bigger than that and you are depending on people you don't know personally to become members you need to find them.

USING OTHER FORUMS TO JUMP START YOUR OWN

One of the best ways to encourage participation on your forum is to start visiting other forums that are in the same topic as your site.

Or, better yet if you can, find some sites that are complimentary to yours. For instance, if your forum is about Off Road Vehicles, then look for sites that focus on things like Extreme Water Sports rather than other ORV sites.

This way you're not competing directly with established forums, but there's a good chance that someone who finds the water sports forum useful will also enjoy yours.

Create an account in a couple complimentary forums and start being active. That doesn't mean come on like gangbusters and spam the site with links to your forum.

It does mean build a personality and presence for your account and if the forum allows it link to your site in your profile's signature. If you are informed and helpful in your posts people will start to respect your opinion and listen to what you have to say.

Once this starts happening you've got them! They will naturally start making their way to your site, and soon you'll have a healthy forum membership.

USING BLOG COMMENTING TO GAIN FORUM MEMBERSHIP

A similar strategy is to start reading and commenting on blogs. Most comment forms allow you to submit a link to your website when you comment. If you start making useful comments frequently on a variety of blogs, your forum will start seeing traffic.

One thing about blog commenting that is different from forum participation is you can comment on blogs that cover the exact same topic as you because your forum is offering a different service than the blog is. You can comment on complimentary blogs as well but don't forget the highly targeted ones.

Remember to keep your comments less about your forum and more about the issue the blog post is talking about. You can discourage other blog readers in the same way as forum members if it becomes too much about you.

There are other ways of getting the word out about your new forum, but those we've talked about will show you the quickest results. You can use them both together if you'd like.

Whichever route you take to promote your forum, don't forget to call on your strongest resource – your friends and family. Even if you don't have a “friends only” forum like mine, your forum has the best chance for quick, lasting growth if it becomes consistently active as soon as possible.

WRAPPING THINGS UP

If you've read this far, that means you've found at least some of what I had to say useful. Hopefully you've started implementing the steps I laid out and your forum is starting to take shape.

Forums are great internet tools and have many different uses. They also give people power that can be taken advantage of. Please keep a close eye on your forum to make sure people are being responsible and understand that as administrator of the forum you have a great deal of responsibility as well.

I thank you for downloading this ebook and would like to know what you thought of it and how I can improve it in the future. If you have any feedback, thoughts, questions or want to know how to make some killer meatballs, please email me at contactus@siteroast.com.

If there's enough response I may include some of your suggestions in a future version of this book. To make sure you have the latest version of this book, visit the [SiteRoast.com Tutorial Series](http://www.SiteRoast.com) page. You are currently reading version 1.0.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RJ Licata is the one man show behind the internet guide and website directory SiteRoast.com.

There he writes about some of the really cool websites that are on the internet, some of which would otherwise be lost in the vastness that is the World Wide Web.

His goal with SiteRoast.com is to make the internet a bit more manageable for everyone, but especially those with limited knowledge of how it all works.

To see more of RJ's ideas, visit SiteRoast.com/blog where you'll have access to his most recent posts on some of the most useful sites on the web.