



Moderating Ham Radio Forums

joys & perils

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Yahoo! Groups

- Advantages:
 - Powerful, stable servers
 - Good management tools
 - Screening of new members
 - Member status control (moderation)
 - Easy to add, remove, ban members
 - Message management – easy message removal
 - Space for files, photos & links with access control
 - Web and e-mail message delivery
 - Disadvantages:
 - Some pop-up advertising
 - Cannot block specific threads by subject

Groups I moderate

( owner.  moderator.)

Group Name	Members		Yahoo!
ic-PW1	209		va7oj
ic7000	4079		va7oj
IC746	2539		va7oj
ic7800	911		va7oj
ICOM718	593		va7oj
icomclassic	285		va7oj
RadioTestGear	127		va7oj
Tokyo-Hy-Power	25		va7oj
4kl	12		va7oj
adat	65		va7oj
AmateurRadioTech	30		va7oj
hfhomebrewpoweramps	39		va7oj
ic7200	455		va7oj
ic756pro3	2662		va7oj
IC7700	618		va7oj
icom2kl	93		va7oj
icom7600	335		va7oj
R9500	92		va7oj

Keeps me pretty busy – but then, I am retired!

Group Structure

- Management teams on all groups
 - One or more owners
 - One or more moderators
 - Team size: 2 to 4
- Team functions:
 - New member screening/approval
 - Message approval for moderated members
 - Keeping order as needed (stopping threads etc.)
 - Team *must* show solidarity when setting group policy or dealing with issues – otherwise group will soon break up
- Moderate traffic volume
 - 4 to 8 member approvals/day
 - Total messages/day: 10 to 40
 - Traffic spikes up when new **icom** radio is announced

Member Approval Process

- All membership requests are screened
 - Anti-spam precaution
 - Some groups require amateur callsign or SWL status
 - Membership denied if this is not supplied in 3 days
 - Most groups keep new members on moderation until first message posted
 - If message contains callsign and is OK, moderation is lifted
 - Message deleted without comment if deemed inappropriate; member removed/banned in extreme cases
- Group configured to send welcome message to new members
 - Additional personal welcome message containing useful links sent out to some new members

Keeping Order

- Group policy on group homepage

Spam, racism, name-calling, vulgarity, religious or political propaganda, personal insults and/or verbal abuse will not be tolerated in this group at any time. Any member posting such material will be placed on moderated status, and is subject to deletion and banning.

- Moderation team's mission:
 - Provide a "safe space" where members can discuss topics in a friendly, relaxed manner
 - Preserve groups' credibility with radio manufacturers
 - Maintain a high level of civility and professionalism
 - Encourage technical contributions and discussions
 - Intervene whenever necessary to end contentious threads
 - Stop "flame wars" before they start
 - Remove/ban troublemakers and spammers
- Positive results seen:
 - Generally high level of technical content
 - Most groups show steady net growth in membership
 - Many groups have world-wide membership

Group Categories

- Icom amateur radio products
 - HF/VHF transceivers & amplifiers
 - Each group covers one product family
 - Classic Icom radios
- Other amateur radio brands
 - Tokyo Hy-Power amplifiers
- General topics
 - Homebrew HF amplifiers
 - Test & measurement
 - General interest

Icom Group Involvement

- Announcement of new HF radios
 - Group formed to support new product
 - Often linked to new-product page on my website
 - Examples: IC-756Pro3, IC-7700, IC-7200, IC-7600
 - 7700, 7200, 7600 groups launched simultaneously with product
- Participation in technical threads
 - Response to technical questions
 - Including research (and even on-air/lab tests) as required
 - Questioners referred to articles on my website and other sites
 - A good question has often triggered a new web article
- Monitoring of threads
 - Keep discussion on-topic
 - Ensure that participants “play nice”

Icom Groups as Info Resource

- Operational questions answered
 - Detailed response, with user-manual reference
 - Some questions addressed off-list, in greater detail
 - We try to avoid fobbing off questions with mere user-manual page number or comments such as "RTFM!"
 - There is an apparent reluctance to consult user manuals, so members are gently encouraged to "crack the book"
 - Discussion of interfaces to non-Icom accessories
- Many posts contain useful links
 - Links to relevant websites are welcomed
 - Members upload items to Files, Links and Photos areas of group
 - *No copyrighted material (e.g. service manuals)*
- Brand comparison
 - Icom/other-brand comparison OK
 - "Bashing" of manufacturers or dealers not permitted

Icom Groups as Info Resource

(continued)

- Repairs and “mods” to Icom radios
 - A few group members are able to tackle repairs; this has led to some excellent technical discussions
 - Technical guidance to these members is encouraged
 - Off-list exchange of service/repair information
 - Moderators generally take a conservative stance, reminding members that SMT soldering stations and good test equipment are required to do repairs
 - Modification of current DSP-based radios is virtually impossible
 - Members are reminded that unauthorized “mods” will void the warranty
 - Cautious approach to “MARS Mod” – regulatory concerns

Icom Groups as Sounding-Board

■ Problem/malfunction reports

- Reports of radio issues or malfunctions are welcomed
 - Such reports, when substantiated, have often led to corrective action by Icom
 - Moderators ensure that problem reports do not degenerate into “bashing”; group’s credibility at stake

■ Comments on feature design

- Requests for clarification of feature operation
- “Wish list” items – requests for new features or changes to existing features
 - We remind members that there is no guarantee their “wishes” will come true!
 - A new feature or change will happen only if a business case can be made for it, or if the change is corrective in nature

Typical Forum Questions

- Q. Is it OK to offer radios etc. for sale?
 - A. Occasional "For Sale/Want to Buy" traffic is acceptable, but quasi-commercial ad traffic is not our mission.
- Q. Is it OK to compare a given radio with other models/brands?
 - A. Yes, as long as it does not degenerate into "bashing" of other radios and/or manufacturers.
- Where can I get my radio repaired?
 - A. Again, comparison of dealers or service centers is fine, as long as it does not become a "bashing session."
- How do I perform the "MARS Mod"?
 - A. Transmit frequency range expansion is a contentious topic. We usually refer this one to mods.dk, and watch the thread very closely as it can rapidly spin out of control. Regulatory concerns also exist in some countries.

Favorite Forum Topics

- Icom forums:
 - Receiver performance
 - Transmitter output power measurement
 - DSP features; explanations of feature usage
 - Antennas & external tuners
 - Microphones & headsets
 - Connecting radio to computer; ham radio software
 - Connecting radio to external linear amplifier
 - Feature/performance comparisons of various radio models
- Other forums:
 - Traffic is very light, so no one specific topic stands out
 - Tokyo Hy-Power group: questions on interfacing with various exciters

Conclusion

- Yahoo! Ham Radio Forums provide a very useful service to members
 - Exchange of information
 - Radios, amplifiers, antennas, accessories, operating modes, computer interfaces, ham radio software etc.
 - Technical information resource
 - Identification of problems
 - Operational and design issues affecting covered products
 - Flag possible design/technical issues to manufacturer
 - Social interaction
 - "Regulars" get to know one another
 - Good complement to on-air discussion (especially in these times of poor HF propagation)