



my black scarf... and nothing

— Candyapple Grey

Me? My BBS is mostly an answering machine. And for the babes. It brings in LOTS of babes.

I call for the conversation. It's nice to see that some people can actually write well enough to have an intelligent conversation as well as to have a little fun.

I call because I'm addicted. I have little chance to socialize with other people, and this is my best opportunity. 'Sides which, it's cheap. & anonymous. & I'm addicted.

Not to mention the fact that, dare I mention it, you're addicted.

I call, partly out of habit, but mostly because it constitutes a good portion of my social life. I enjoy the witty banter, what little of it there is, as well as the opportunity to engage in serious discussions which, believe it or not, DO actually take place from time to time. Plus the anonymity allows ample opportunity for the occasional act of purely EVILE CAOTIC BADNESS!!!

I call the BBSs for the conversations. I do almost no downloading; most of the boards don't carry software for my system. I like the interplay of personalities in both the serious and the silly rooms.

I call to converse with people. Those whom I know, and those whom I've never met. I find it interesting to discuss things with people who I know only (the majority of them) by their aliases and know only their suggested gender, and only other bits of info. that people volunteer. I don't ('scuse) download anything, I just leave horribly disjointed messages and am occasionally, as others keep telling me, crude.

I call boards because of the conversation, mostly. I started out on the file/techie type boards, but soon discovered RT and Anti-the-system. I still call some file boards, and do the odd bit of downloading, but most of my BBS time is spent on the convo boards.

I find that I call the boards mostly for the conversation as well; you find intelligently serious as well as humorous conversation going on — it's one way of socializing "long-distance."

But were afraid to ask

How do modems work? Well, a modem lets a computer talk to another computer with a modem, over a phone line. Computers usually communicate with binary information. Like a light switch, binary information is either a one or a zero — on or off.

Phone lines however can only carry sounds — like voices (though if you get a rotten long distance line this is debatable). So a modem has to convert the binary information that the computer uses into tones. At the other end the receiving modem does the reverse.

Simple modems simply turn ones into one tone and zeros into another. The receiving modem listens for those particular tones. Phone lines are tuned to carry the frequencies of audible speech, so those are the tones used by the modems.

This is actually a gross over simplification, but it will do.

Well that's basic modems. Now we get to modem speeds.

As anyone who has ever tried to buy a modem knows, the more money you spend on a modem the faster it will transmit information. When you go into a computer store you will hear three terms which may confuse you: baud, bits and characters.

You probably know what a character is. It's a single letter. (It's sometimes called a byte.)

A computer represents characters using bits. Bits are either one or zero. Using combinations of bits, computers make up characters/bytes. Computers normally use 8 bits for representing a single character, but when talking about communications characters take up ten bits of information because the communications equipment needs to separate characters from each other.

A baud is a speed. A 300 baud modem talks at a speed of 300 bits per second. Or if you divide by ten you get a speed of around 30 characters per second.

Common modem speeds are 300 baud (which is almost obsolete these days), 1200 baud (the most common), 2400

baud (slowly becoming the standard), and 9600 baud which is usually expensive. Ball park prices are \$200 for 1200 baud modems, \$400 for 2400, and about \$2000 for 9600 baud modems. (You can only buy 300 baud modems used.)

To give you some indication of speed, an average typist will type at 300 baud and a fast reader can read at about 2000 baud. The faster modems are usually used for sending data between computers.

Modem speed is determined by the method used to transmit the information over the phone line. The simple method described above is used for 300 baud transmission. That is about the maximum speed you can achieve over a phone line with it.

The next step in technology is to use several tones and transmit several bits at the same time. This is the technique used in 1200 baud modems that transmits four bits at the same time.

More advanced modems use even more complicated schemes. These modems sometimes have more computer power than the systems they are attached to. One high-tech modem currently sold, the "Telebit Trailblazer," has as much processing power as a Macintosh. (It has the same 68000 microprocessor as the Macintosh and one megabyte of memory.) It manages to get communication rates over a phone line that are the same as if you had a terminal next to the computer.

The Trailblazer divides the phone lines into 512 separate frequencies, analyzes how much information it can transmit on each channel due to the current connection of phone lines the telephone company switching equipment has given you, and then throttles back or increases the data rate correspondingly.

Using these techniques modems can communicate over noisy long-distance lines, something which was difficult to do previously. The new modems are so good at filtering out phone line problems that with some you can pick up the phone while the modem is on it and shout into it, not affecting the communication even one little bit.

University of Alberta
Alumni Association



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