

# Effective use of Computers in M.R.O's.

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## Introduction

The word "computer" strikes fear into the hearts of many a strong man or woman. Yet, with a little patience and determination, the computer can become one of the most effective, cost efficient tools available. With the prices of computers and peripherals plummeting, anyone can have one of the most useful and dedicated workers on their team.

How a computer can be used in our causes can be broken down into three basic categories:

1. Database and membership.
2. Communication and message delivery.
3. On-line data gathering and processing.

### Database and Membership

Let's begin with database and membership. An MRO can have an unlimited number of members. When the membership starts exceeding 20 or so, a computer can be a savior. To start with, a computer gathers information you put in. Each bit of information entered in a database is placed in a storage area called a record. A record is made up of a number of items that can be sorted and used for later needs. When you are through working with a record, the computer then stores it and all related records on to a disk in the form of a file. So, in its simplest form, a database is a collection of data, organized in categories, and stored in a file.

Sounds a little confusing for the first timer, but it is simpler than it sounds. For example, take the membership application for your local MRO, and look it over. You filled it with certain information such as: Name, Address, Phone number, Gender, Type of bike, Congressional District, Senatorial District, etc. Guess what? You have just filled out a record. And the MRO secretary has all the membership applications stored in one place, a file. Simpler than you thought.

Now that you have your collection of records in a file, what can the computer do with it? This

is where the power of the computer comes into play. Computers love to crunch numbers and data. With the file as an information source, the computer is set for high gear.

The number of things the computer can do with the file is limited only by your needs or imagination. How many members are there? The computer can keep a running count. Need address labels for the newsletter or special mailing? The computer reads the names and addresses and spits out the labels. A local politician is holding a town hall meeting and you want to have a show of force or some questions answered; the computer runs through the file and picks out all the members in the politician's district or area and you can notify the members at will.

At minimum, the Membership Coordinator and the Secretary can see the importance of a computer in keeping track of the members, not to mention the other important tasks that may need immediate attention. This brings us to the second use for the computer.

## Communication and Messaging

Communication and messaging is the cornerstone for effective management in this day and age. There is no longer any delay in information exchange or call to action when a situation warrants it. One example of this occurred in my home state of Illinois. First, the House sent H.B. 2551(helmet law) through the Health and Safety committee instead of the Transportation Committee. Within minutes the word was out that it would be coming to vote and we need to contact our Representatives A.S.A.P..

Besides the phone tree that was established, the computer also came into play. A.B.A.T.E. of Illinois has a bulletin board system at the main office and the information about the bill was posted for everyone to see and react. At the same time, I was contacted about creating a flyer with the pertinent information for immediate distribu-

tion. I whipped up a quick flyer on the computer, ran off a few copies, and we were well on our way to saturating the biker community with information on what had to be done. All of this done in a few hours, with professional looking documentation and speed that surprised a few of the pro-helmet Representatives.

Another use of the computer in the communication arena is the use of E-Mail or electronic mail. With the addition of a fax/modem, a computer becomes an instant letter writer and postal clerk. With all the talk lately of the Information Superhighway going on, a computer lets you experience it. Just about every politician has a fax machine or an E-Mail address. Using the computer to compose and transmit a letter of your feelings on legislation enables you to communicate those feelings instantly. You write your letter, and use the computer's fax/modem to send it to the parties involved. Instead of writing multiple letters to the politicians of choice, a computer allows you to send the same letter or fax to all of them instantly. No waiting for the mail carrier, no lost or late letters, and no buying stamps. Usually it is just the cost of a local call. This way you can easily target specific parties that you feel need to be aware of your views immediately.

A fax/modem works the same as a regular fax, except there is no paper on your end. Everything is written and transmitted electronically. Using a phone list that you compile yourself, the computer and fax software make sure that all correspondence is delivered to your satisfaction. The fax software also gives you a listing with transmission verification data displayed, including time and date, number of pages; etc.. Using the modem, you connect to an on-line service that allows you access to an E-Mail system, that can send the message to your party. All that is needed is the person's E-Mail address. This is just not a local situation either. You can even E-Mail the President and Vice-President via a system called the Internet (president@gov.com and vicepresident@gov.com, F.Y.I.).

## Going On-Line

Finally, this brings me to my last point, on-line data gathering and processing. I mentioned

earlier that A.B.A.T.E. of Illinois maintains a Bulletin Board System (BBS for short). The M.R.F. also has one available with the late breaking news at the national level (202-546-5894). Various on-line systems have a motorcycling forum on board. A forum is a gathering of like-minded people who exchange information, advice and views about an interest area, such as motorcycling in general. By viewing or entering in on discussions you can discover a wealth of information that may come in handy.

Besides the forums, there are sections called libraries that contain files that you may read on-line or download (send by modem to your computer) for your use. By careful research, you can unearth mounds of data that can be saved for your needs.

Anything from the latest statistics on motorcycle usage for ammunition in your latest legislative fight, to an amusing piece of clip-art for your newsletter, is available to you. A computer and an on-line service can open up a new level of understanding about the world around you. A computer can take a dull, dreary, time-consuming chore and turn it into a quick, efficient, and useful task.

In conclusion, a computer is not a thing to fear but an effective tool that puts MROs on the same footing as our opponents. The computer gives us the same efficient, quick, professional response time, and access to data, that they have solely enjoyed long enough. It is this change in resources, and attitude, that the politicians both fear and respect.