

Boys' Life[®]

Net-ting a Profit: Kid businessmen make money a new way: online.

By Janice Arenofsky

Lots of kids cruise the Internet. Some ride the Information Superhighway all the way to the bank.

Take Cub Scout Sam Perl of Pack 270, Westfield, N.J. He's the owner of SamArise Wake-Up Service (www.mjbovo.com/SamArise.htm).

"On my computer, I keep a list of people with their phone numbers and the times I have to wake them," the 9-year-old says.

Then he programs his telephone to speed-dial up to 20 clients a day. "Some day I might use a computer program that calls people automatically," he says.

For his cyberduties—which include updating his Web page, answering customer e-mail and printing out bills—he says he's netted more than \$2,000 in profits.

Making money isn't the only advantage of becoming an Internet entrepreneur. You can also work when you want to, be your own boss and make lots of new friends.

Monitoring Customers

Safe friends. Instead of traveling to shows and answering newspaper ads, Internet biz kids can transact business from the privacy—and safety—of their house.

"And it's easier than doing business face-to-face," says Michael Podraza of Schaumburg, Ill. The 12-year-old is the founder of the Collectible Exchange (www.beaniex.com).

Michael receives about 2,800 online requests a month to buy, sell and trade Beanie Babies. So far, customers have swapped more than 35,000 of the stuffed plush toys over his Web site.

The Write Stuff

Daniel Miller Jr., 10, turned his hobby into cash when his interest in sending computer-designed messages to friends morphed into Daniel Miller Jr.'s Custom Postcards, an online stationery and postcard business.

Daniel, who lives in Pittsburgh, Pa., and is working on setting up a Web site, uses his computer to design artwork and take e-mail orders. The Internet, he says, can create a worldwide customer base. Unfortunately, it also can make it easier for people to get away without paying.

"I've learned to get the money first—no matter how nice people seem," says Daniel. He also makes hard copies, or printouts, of orders to avoid later disputes.

A Screening Success

As these boys know, one key to a successful online business is an eye-popping Web page. They update their sites with cool colors and flashy graphics. (You can buy design programs at any computer store.)

Of course, it also takes hard work; Michael spends about 30 hours a week, after school and homework, on his business.

Not that cyber biz kids have any complaints. They've turned on—online, that is—to a hot new trend that won't be going offline soon.

COMPUTERS

Safety in Cyberspace

Maybe you don't sell stuff on the Net, but you might shop there. Follow these do's and don'ts for doing business online.

Do:

Check out businesses. Contact consumer protection services such as the National Fraud Information Center (www.fraud.org, 800-876-7060) or the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org).

Keep printed record of purchases.

Don't:

Give out personal information (such as your name and address) unless the business is well-known or uses a "secure server" to encrypt information. (To check for this, look for a "locked padlock" or "key" picture at the screen top or bottom.)

Buy from businesses that "spam" you with unwanted e-mail advertisements.

Meet with an online contact without your parents' permission.

Reply to e-mail that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Weaving the Web

Do your research before starting any business—online or otherwise:

- KidsWay Foundation, www.kidsway.com, (888) KIDSWAY
- National Coalition for Empowering Youth Entrepreneurs, www.agnr.umd.edu/users/kidbiz
- Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, www.emkf.org

The Boy Scouts of America



<http://www.scouting.org>