Beta phpBB Forum
Application Administrator Guide
Center for New Media and Citizen Engagement (CNMCE)

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Version 2.0

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Getting Started with Your phpBB Forum

General Overview

Internet forums are communication tools. A modern version of the "bulletin board", a forum is generally a meeting ground for people with similar interests, normally focused on a single topic or a small group of related topics. The goal is to develop a community of users engaged in a lively discussion, commonly including questions, comparisons, opinion polls, and debates. Attached to each topic will be a string of user-generated posts (collectively called a "thread"), usually listed chronologically.

Administration

Forums are governed by designated administrators and moderators, who are responsible for the forums' conception, technical maintenance, and policies (creation and enforcing). An administrator manages the technical details required for running the site (see *Administration Control Panel*, page 3). Main administrative tasks include promoting members to moderators, creating forums and subforums, organizing visitors and logged-in members into user groups, and setting "permissions" levels (see *Permissions*, page 9). These determine such things as user access to particular forums, whether a user may start a new topic or only post replies to existing topics, and whether a user is allowed to initiate voting polls. Administrators often also act as moderators, and are allowed to make forum-wide announcements.

Moderators

A forum's day-to-day user interactions are managed by moderators, forum users who are granted access to the posts and threads of all members for the purpose of moderating discussion and keeping the forum clean. Moderators also answer general questions, address users' concerns, and respond to specific complaints. They may have ranks: some may only have privileges in a particular forum (or topic), while others may be allowed access anywhere (see *Moderators*, page 16).

Users

Many forums require a user to provide some basic personal information and register as a member before allowing full access. They frequently organize registered members into topic-oriented user groups. Different privileges and rights can be assigned to different groups, and forums will often allow only registered users to post. Unregistered users are commonly known as visitors or guests, and typically are allowed only viewing privileges. Occasionally an administrator will disallow visitors from even reading the forum as an incentive to become a registered member.

Rules

Most forums have a list of rules that the creators expect users to follow, and a FAQ section containing basic site use information for new members and guests unfamiliar with the forum. Rules on forums usually apply to the entire user body but can have exceptions, and moderators can limit access or completely bar users who violate the guidelines.

Posts

Posted messages appear as a series of stacked boxes, and include the user's details, the date and time, and often a reference to the topic (sometimes called the original post, or OP). Posts usually require a minimum number of characters, and have a maximum limit on length. Forums also usually have a private message (PM) capability, allowing users to engage in personal conversations that don't appear in the topic's thread, and some allow attachments and customized text formatting.

Visibility

The key to getting a new forum off the ground is visibility. Pay attention to what is known as search engine optimization (SEO), making sure that your information paragraphs, topic titles, and posts contain keywords that increase your site's exposure (see *Appendix B: Search Engine Optimization (SEO)*, page 19). Tell people about your site, post on other forums, and take any opportunity to set up backlinks to your forum from other sites that are related (see *Appendix C: Backlinks*, page 22).

Forum Tips

- Start small. A few forums with lots of posts make the site appear more active.
- Define and post a simple set of rules outlining what is acceptable and what is not.
- Invite subject matter experts to participate, or ask them to post articles about the topic to spur discussion. The more experts you can get to contribute, the better-known your forum will become.
- Regularly start new threads or discussions about current "hot topics".
- Encourage member-submitted articles.
- Don't be invisible. Actively participate in the discussions by posting your own replies and new questions. Be sure to respond to every first post by a new member.
- Develop a strategy for building a group of moderators who have diverse opinions and styles, and who are skilled at managing conflict. Be quick to intervene in any nasty arguments, personal attacks or unsubstantiated accusations.
- Work diligently to keep "noise" from distracting the conversations (i.e., useless comments, spam, "me too" posts).
- Show your appreciation by sending your members emails or private messages thanking them for their contributions, weekly reminders with site news or interesting new threads. Let them know you listen to their requests and concerns.
- Find ways to reward your most active members, such as posting announcements thanking regularly contributing participants.
- Always send an email welcoming new members. If possible, create a chat room or bio type of forum where newcomers can meet regular members.
- Participate in events that are likely to be attended by your target audience so you can let them know about your forum.
- Create a space that allows off-topic discussion. The more your members interact, the more likely they are to visit regularly.

This document provides basic information necessary to initiate and begin to manage your forum. You can control-click on any page cross-reference to navigate around the document. Links to many sources of more detailed information on a wide variety of topics can be found in *Appendix A: Useful Links*, on page 18.

> *TIP: Because this document is designed as a quick guide, some specific Administrative functions and settings may not be addressed. Please contact the CEP Team with any questions.*

URLs, Themes/Templates, Plug-Ins, and Upgrades Caution

Certain features of your provisioned forum are either pre-set or require that modifications be made by the technical team. Therefore:

- Your URL will look like this: *http://forum.citizen.apps.gov/yourforumname/*
  At this time, the URL is fixed once the product is provisioned. Future releases may offer more flexibility by offering Vanity URLs.
- MODS have been added to our version of the phpBB3 forum.
  > *TIP: Please suggest new, interesting MODS at our Release Blog.*
- You may not install phpBB3 upgrades. This must be done at the host level.
- If you have a technical or functional question regarding this forum product or have a suggestion to make, use our Online Help Forum.
  > *TIP: Submit your question at Forum Help.*

Getting Started

Administration Control Panel

When you first visit your phpBB site, **login** with the administrator username and password that were set during the provisioning process. This brings up the **Board index** screen. Next, access the **Administration Control Panel** (ACP) by clicking its link, centered at the bottom of the page.
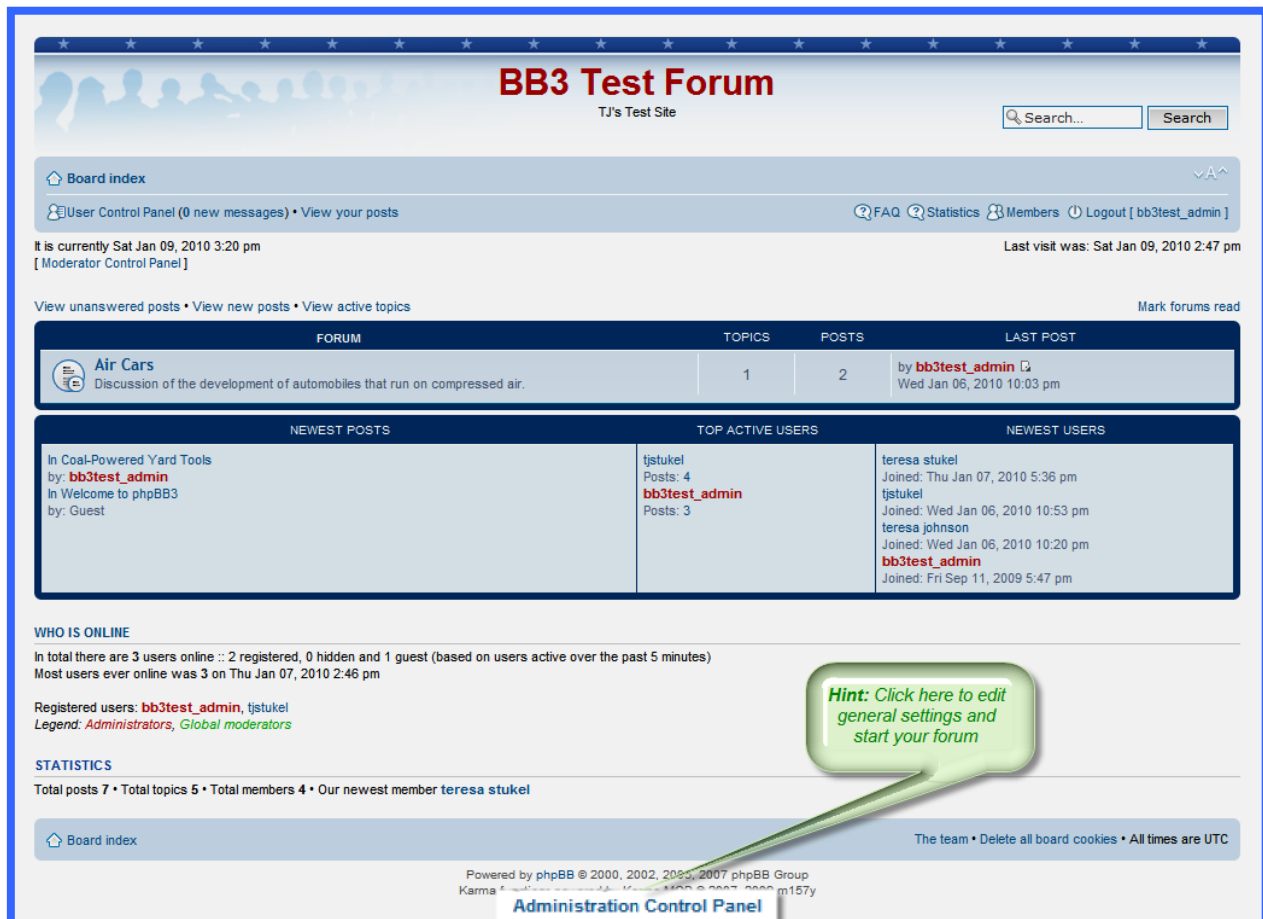
Clicking here will generate a second login page for security purposes.

After successful re-authentication, the ACP **General** section screen will appear. It presents some basic statistics and information about your board, and a menu that provides quick access to some frequently-used administration pages. On the left side of the panel are links that allow you to control the settings for your site. You can modify or turn off almost all features.

Administration functions are grouped into eight different categories: General, Forums, Posting, Users and Groups, Permissions, Styles, Maintenance, and System--all on tabs located at the top of the page. Specific functions for each category are found in the left-hand sidebar menus of each page. Here are the tools that define the way your forum operates. To begin a quick forum setup, click **Board Settings**.

> **TIP:** It is best to temporarily disable the forum while making administrative changes. This can be done in the **Board Settings** panel using the **Disable Board** switch. You can write a message that will appear while the site is disabled.
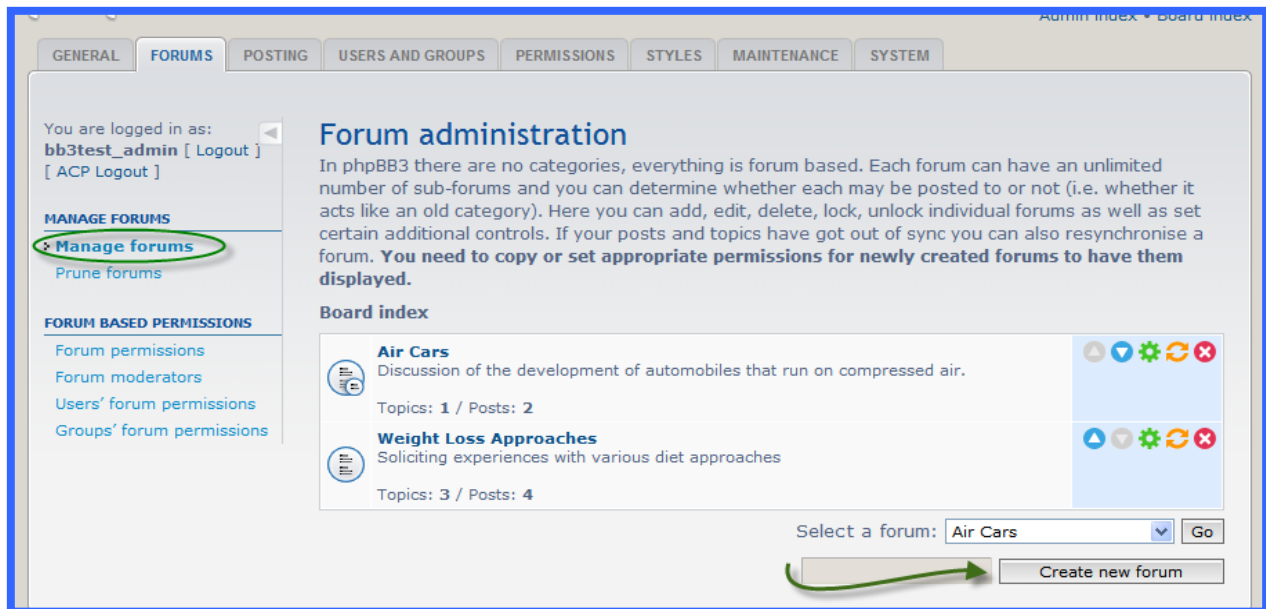
Board Settings

In this panel you can set basic information for your site: the board name and its description (a tag line or slogan that will appear below the site name in your header), the timezone, and the date/time format. The settings here will apply to any forums you create. Once these are defined, your basic site is set up.

Also in this panel are Meta Description and Meta Keyword settings that affect the way your site is seen by search engines (see *Appendix B: Search Engine Optimization (SEO)*, page 19). Search engine recognition is important in building traffic to your site.

When done editing the basic settings, click the **Submit** button at the bottom of the screen. Check your changes by clicking the **Board index** link at the upper right. Other Board Configuration settings will be discussed later in the document. Next, click the **Forums** tab to view the Forum administration page.

> *TIP: In the **Global Meta Keywords** box, you should add ANY words or phrases that describe your site. Separate them with commas. These appear in the source code header, and increase your visibility to search engines.*

Forums

Forum Administration

The Forum administration page allows you to manage forums on your site. From this page you can:
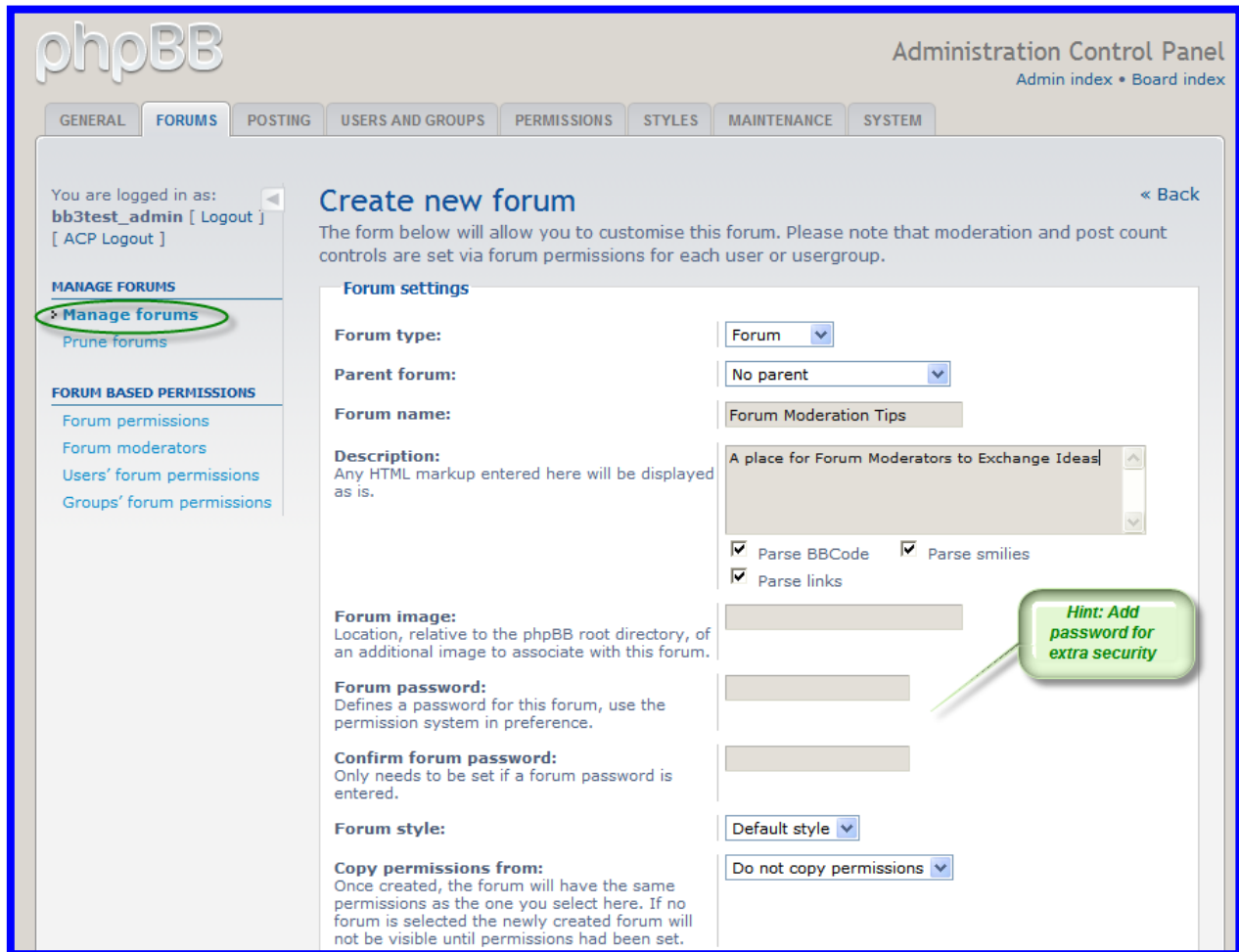
- Add new forums and subforums.
- Edit, delete, lock and unlock forums.
- Add new categories.
- Change forum name, order, or descriptions.
- Set forum-specific permissions (see *Permissions*, page 9).

If there are existing forums, certain functions can be performed just by clicking the buttons to the right of the forum name. Their functions are:

- Move a forum up.
- Move a forum down.
- Edit a forum's settings.
- Resynchronize a forum.
- Delete a forum.

> *NOTE: Forums, topics and posts cannot be retrieved once deleted. Consider using a hidden forum that topics can be moved to for future reference.*

To add your first new forum, type a name in the textbox at the bottom right and click the **Create new forum** button. The Create new forum page has tools to set the basic options.

Create New Forum

Enter a name and a brief description, and select one of the three forum types:

- Forum, where users can post topics, questions, and replies. This is the default, and will be used the most. This type can also be used as a Parent forum when creating subforums.

- Link, which will be visible in the board index menu but points to a URL (an external website) instead of a forum.

- Category, which contains multiple forums or links for a specific topic. The Category contents will be listed under its name in the board index menu.

Forums can contain categories, as well as sub-forums and links. Users cannot post to either Links or Categories, but can post to any forums within a category. Other functions on the **Create new forum** page include:

- Selecting an image to be displayed on the forum.
- Setting a password to limit user access to a particular group.
  NOTE: If you set a password for a particular forum, that forum's users will need notification.
- Copying permissions from an existing forum.
- Enable/disable post review and search indexing.
- Set "pruning" controls for automatic deletion of posts.
- Enter forum rules that will show at the top of every forum, or set a link to a rules page.

Once the basic settings are configured, scroll to the bottom of the page and click the **Submit** button to create your forum. The screen will show a success message, and then automatically bring up the **Permissions** screen.

TIP: You MUST either copy or set permissions for a forum to be visible in the Board index.
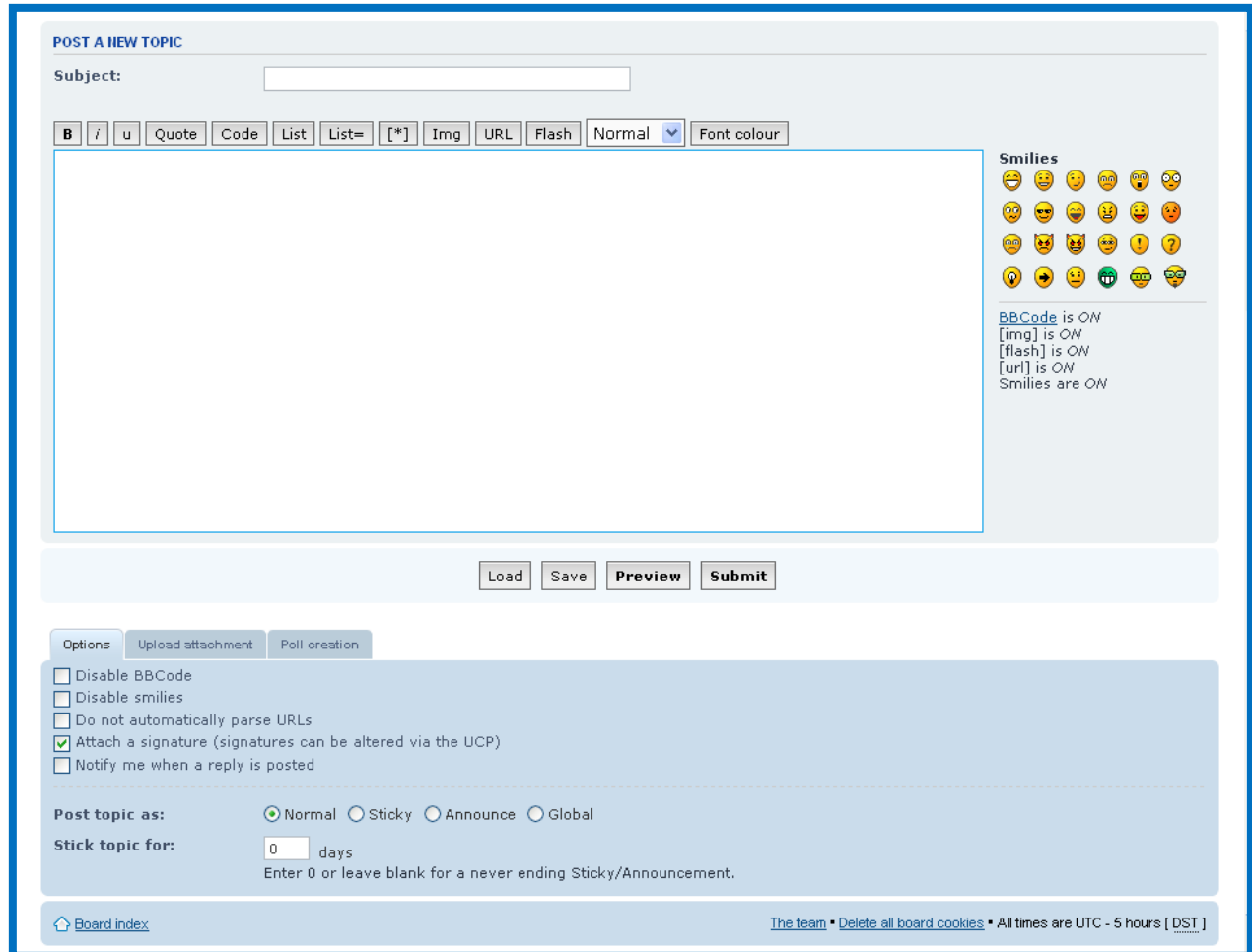
Create New Topic

From the Board Index, click on any listed forum. This opens the forum and shows a list of existing topics. Clicking the **NEWTOPIC** button at either the top or bottom of the forum screen will open an editing

window.

You must enter a subject line (this is what will show in the forum list), and then you can enter (or paste) your topic text, apply formatting, and preview the look by clicking the **Preview** button at the bottom of the screen.

Also at the bottom of the screen you can select one of four types of topics:

- Normal—will appear in a list of topics under a forum.
- Sticky—will appear at the top of every page in a forum, and can be time-limited.
- Announcement—will appear at the top of the first page in a forum, and can be time-limited.
- Global—will appear on every forum on the site.

When you are satisfied, click the **Submit** button and your topic will be created.

TIP: You must be logged in as at least a Registered User to create a new topic.

Subscribe to Forum or Topic

To subscribe to a specific forum, click the "Subscribe forum" link at the bottom of the page upon entering the forum. To subscribe to a topic, reply to the topic with the "Subscribe" checkbox checked or click the "Subscribe topic" link at the bottom of the topic window. Click "Unsubscribe" at the bottom of

the page to remove your subscriptions, or go to your User Control Panel and follow the links to your subscriptions.

Forum Moderation

In the *Permissions* section (see page 9) of the Administration Control Panel you can choose to require moderation, or pre-approval, of topics and replies before they become visible in the forum. You can elect to require approval of only a new user's first post, to have every new post moderated, or to have
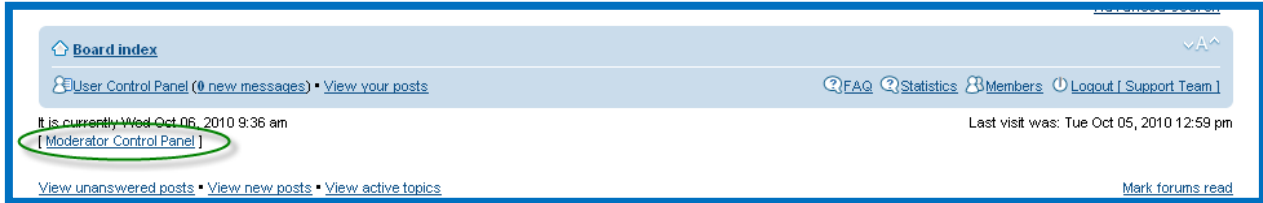
none at all. Users granted Moderator privileges can access the Moderation tools by clicking the **Moderator Control Panel** link at the top of the Board Index page.

The Main screen of the Moderator Control Panel shows the most recent five:

- posts awaiting approval.
- moderator reports.
- moderation activities.
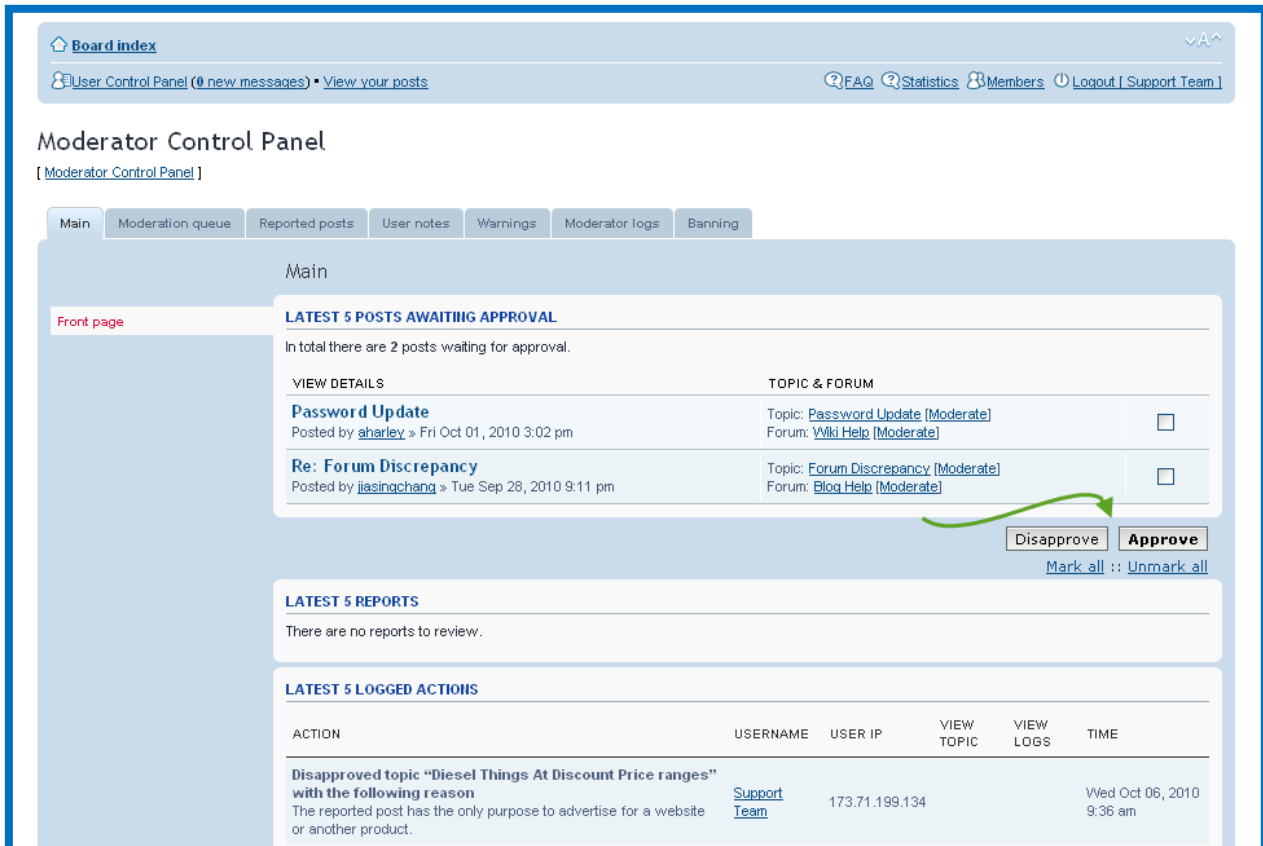
Clicking on a post will open it, and the moderator can then choose to approve or disapprove it.

> *TIP: You also have the option of notifying users when posts are approved/disapproved, and giving a reason for disapproval.*
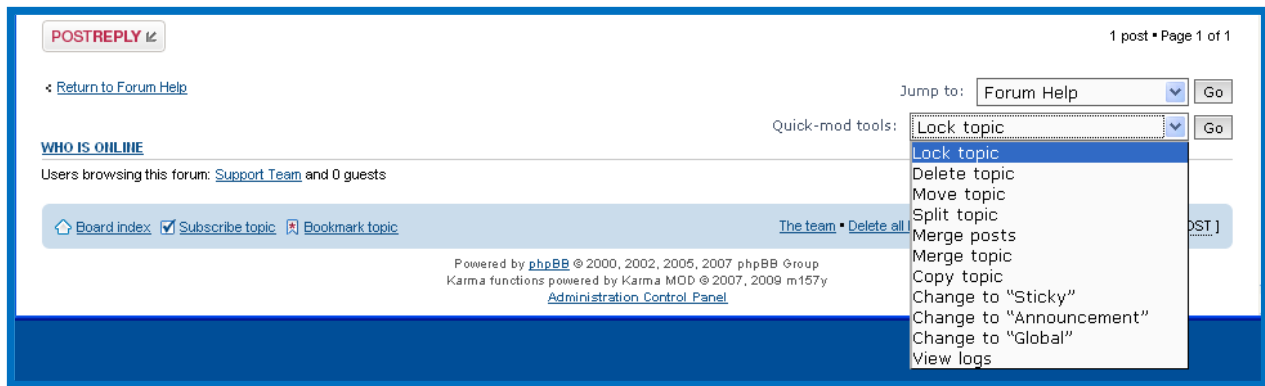
Beneath individual topics, there are "quick-mod" tools that give a moderator various options to modify the topic in different ways. These include the ability to lock, unlock, delete, move, split, merge and copy the topic. As well as these, they are also able to change the topic type (Sticky/Announcement/Global), and also view the topic's logs.
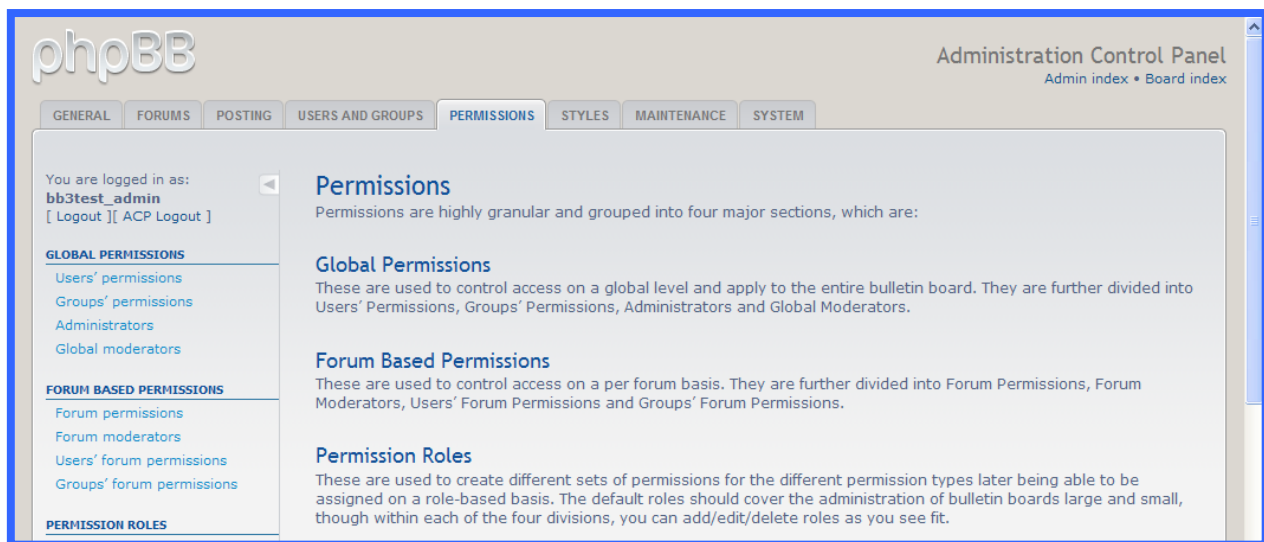
Permissions

Permission Levels

Permissions control what users can and cannot do on your board. Numerous ways are provided to access and manage permissions, both broadly and on a very granular level. Generally, there are four levels of permissions, and each level can be individualized.

- Administrator, able to access and control all or most aspects of the site;
- Moderator, usually able to control the discussion parts of the board;
- Users, able to post topics, questions, replies, and polls; and
- Guests or visitors usually limited to reading the forums.

Permission Types

There are two basic types of permissions:

- Global, which affect the whole board and are not bound to specific forums, and
- Forum based, which control specific permissions for each forum.

Global Permissions can be used to limit user options in the User Control Panel, and to control searching, private messaging, or using of avatars/signatures. Administrator and Global Moderator permissions are also set here.

Forum Based Permissions are set for each forum/user or group combination individually. They can also be divided into two types:

- **Group permissions**, which assign forum and feature access to either default or custom groups, and
- **User permissions**, which control the access and features available to individual members.

All permissions can be assigned to either groups or users. For ease of management, use group permissions. This will allow you to assign pre-established sets of permissions to users, rather than having to manually set permissions one user at a time. Although we will start with the default groups, custom groups for particular forums can be established as your user community grows (see *Managing Users*, page 16).The following screenshot (from the **Manage groups** page) shows a window that will list both default and User-defined groups.
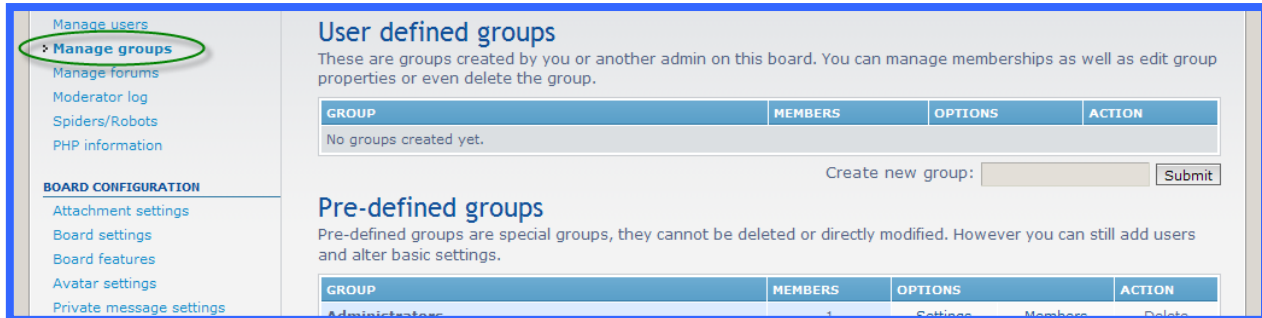
Due to space limitations, and for simplicity, this document will focus on forum-based group permissions. Click on **Groups' Forum Permissions** to begin setting your forum access controls.
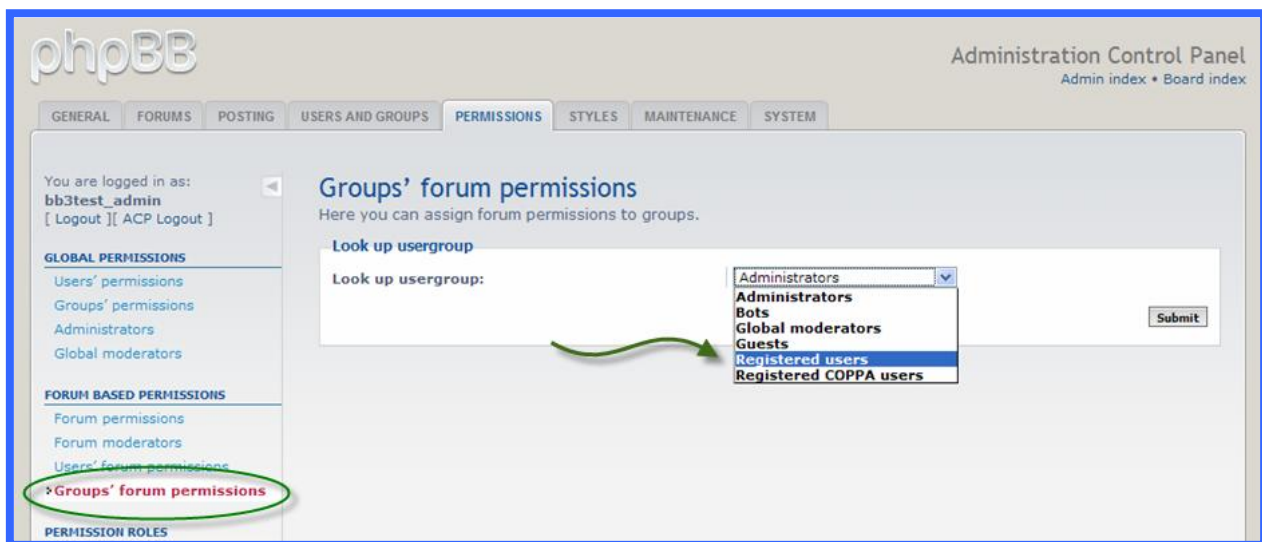
Groups' Forum Permissions

The drop-down menu on the page shown above lists the default groups. Start by selecting **Registered users** and click **Submit**. (You will repeat these steps later for the groups **Administrators** and **Guests**.)

Select your new forum in the box on the following screen. Then, click **Submit**.
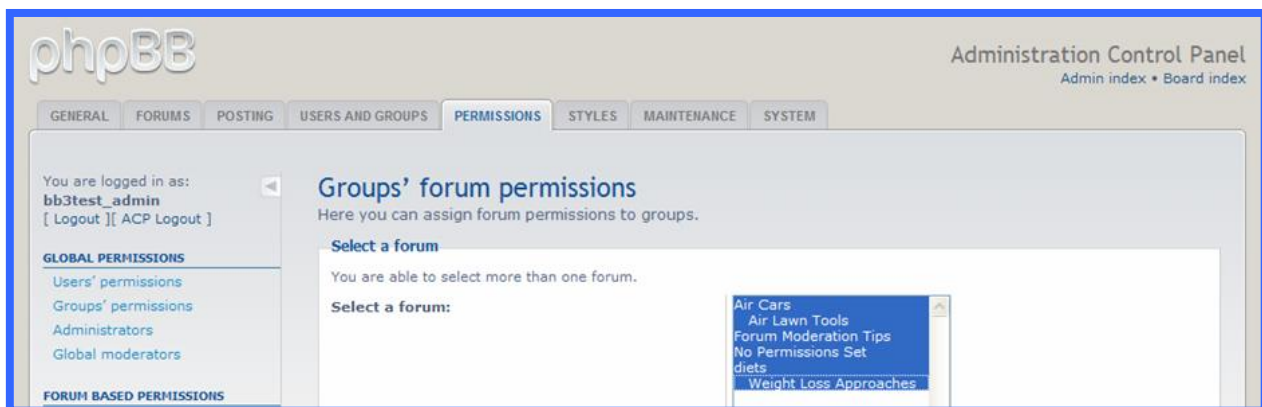
This will bring up the **Setting permissions** screen. where you can choose from a list of Roles (pre-defined sets of permissions), or you can assign permissions manually in one of four ways:
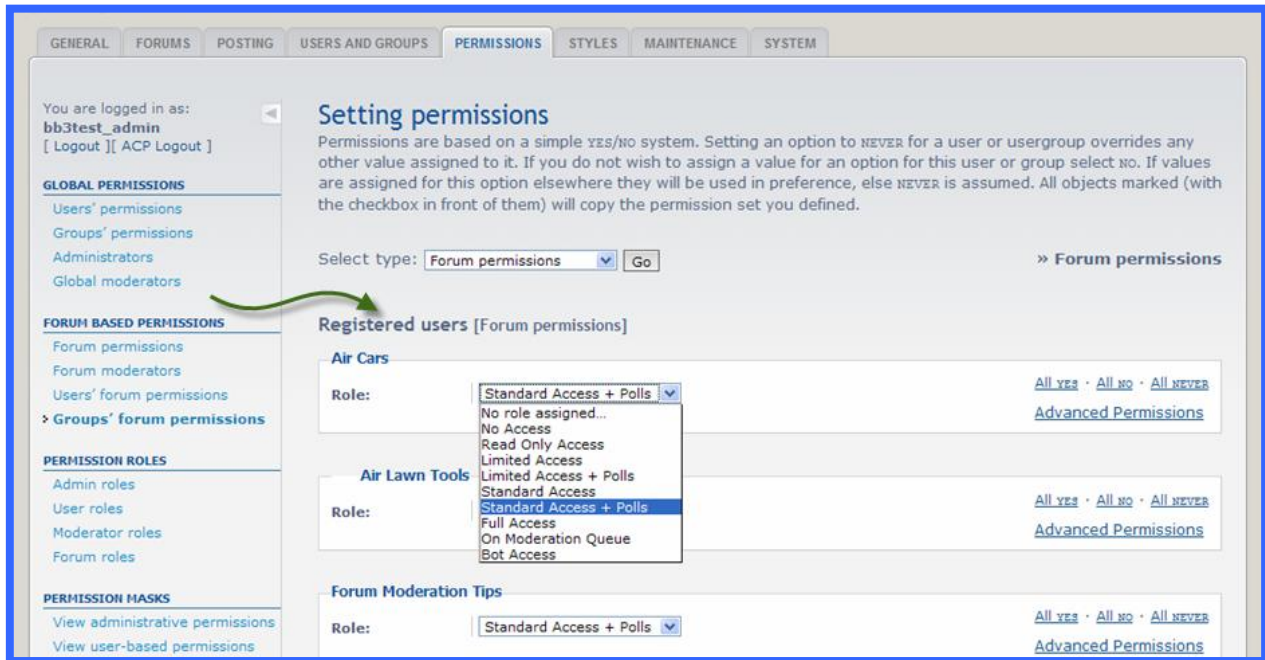
- **All yes** gives full access to all features, usually reserved for Administrators;
- **All no** denies all access, including being allowed to even see the forum list in the Board index;
- **All never**, which is the same as **All no**, but cannot be overridden by an individual **Yes** permission checked in another permissions section; and,
- **Advanced permissions**, which brings up menus for choosing permissions individually.
  *TIP: Be sure to select your forum(s) by highlighting within the box rather than clicking the **All forums** checkbox below it.*

On this screen, the group for which you are setting permissions will appear as a head, followed by the permissions type in parentheses. Underneath you will see a list of the forums and subforums you highlighted previously, each with a box containing the text "No role assigned" (and four options for manual permission setting on the far right). Clicking the **Role** box presents a drop-down menu listing the default roles. Select **Standard Access + Polls** as the role to assign to **Registered users**, and then click **Apply all permissions** at the bottom of the screen.
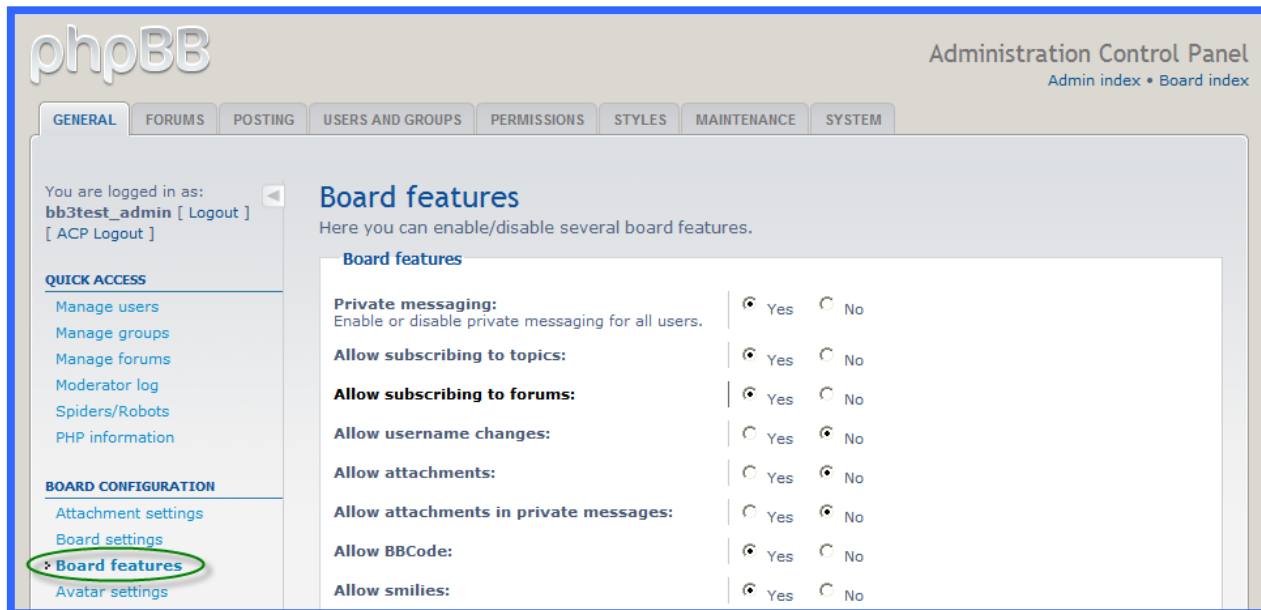
You will then see the screen on the following page.
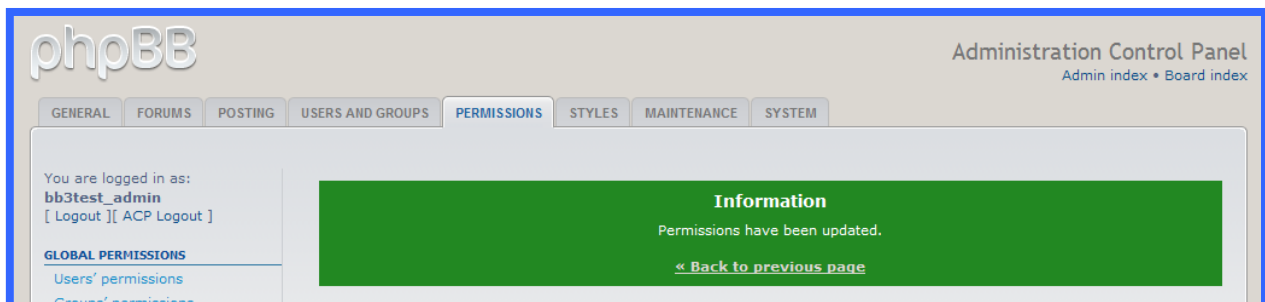
Click **Back to previous screen**, and then click **Groups' forum permissions** again and repeat the process for both **Administrator** and **Guest** roles. Select **Full Access** for the Administrator group, and **Read Only** for the Guests. Upon registering, a user will automatically have the privileges assigned to the **Registered user** group. Any user you designate as an Administrator has full board access privileges, and Guests can browse the forums, but cannot post without registering. Use the **Permission masks** button on the left to view final permission settings for the various groups. You can manually change permissions at any time.

Board Configuration

The various menu items under Board Configuration on the left allow you to enable or disable dozens of features of your site. Generally, any settings you choose to disable here will override any individual or group permissions you might set elsewhere. If the **Board settings** have been done (see *Board Settings*, page 5), click **Board features** next.

Board Features

On this page the Administrator can globally do such major things as:

- Enable or disable private messaging. If enabled, select specific settings at the **Private messaging** page. This menu can also be reached through the **Posts** tab at the top of the ACP.
- Allow or disallow subscribing to topics and posts. Subscribing allows automatic notification of a user if a specific topic or forum is updated.
- Allow or disallow attachments. If attachments are allowed, a wide range of options can be set through the **Attachment settings** page. This menu can also be reached through the **Posts** tab at the top of the ACP.
- Permit individual users to disable automatic word censoring.
- Enable or disable a variety of post settings. Scrolling down through the **Post settings** page reveals numerous controls for managing posts, such as enabling or disabling BBCode (a custom text formatting tool), defining the number of topics or posts allowed per page, and setting the maximum number of poll options.
- Allowing or disallowing bookmarks.
- Enabling or disabling display of Moderators and custom profiles.

After you are satisfied with the settings on a screen, scroll to the bottom and click **Submit**.

> *TIP: The **Post settings** page will automatically update any duplicate settings that are changed on the **Board features** page, and vice versa.*
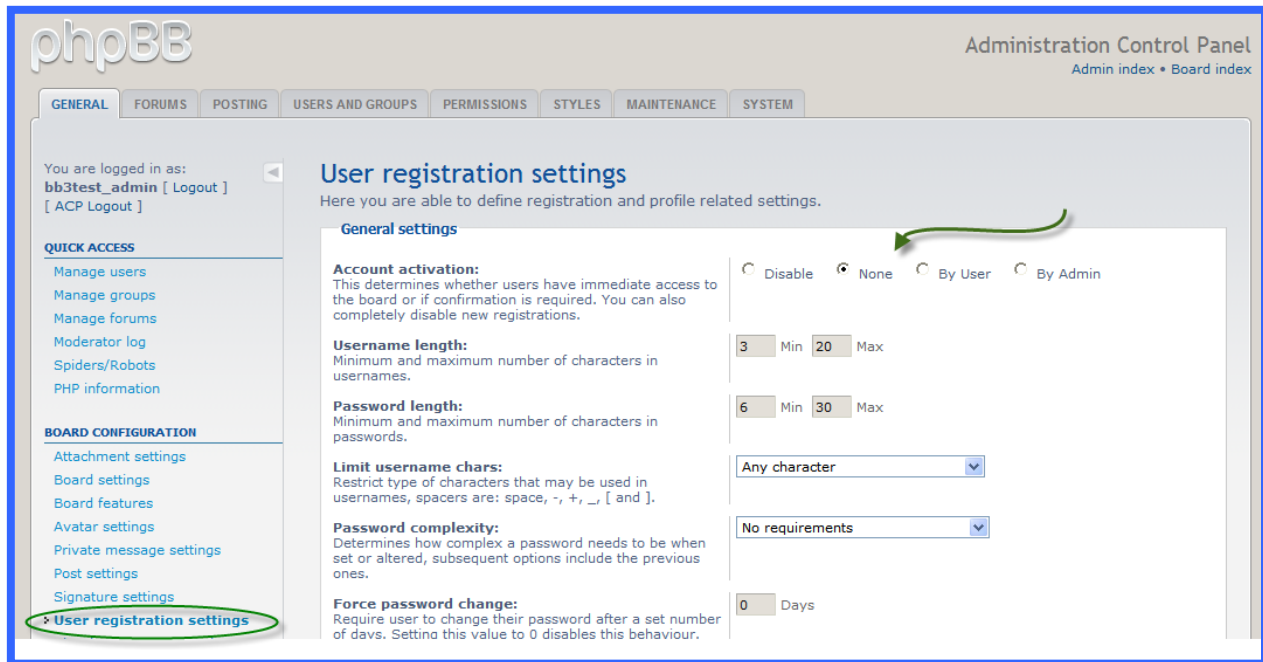
User Registration Settings

Settings on this page determine whether registration is required for a user to read or participate in forums, and how an account is activated.

You can also set such parameters as:

- Minimum and maximum name lengths;
- Required password length;
- Restrictions on the types of characters that can be used in a username; and,
- Requirements for password complexity.

There are four options that determine how a user account is activated:
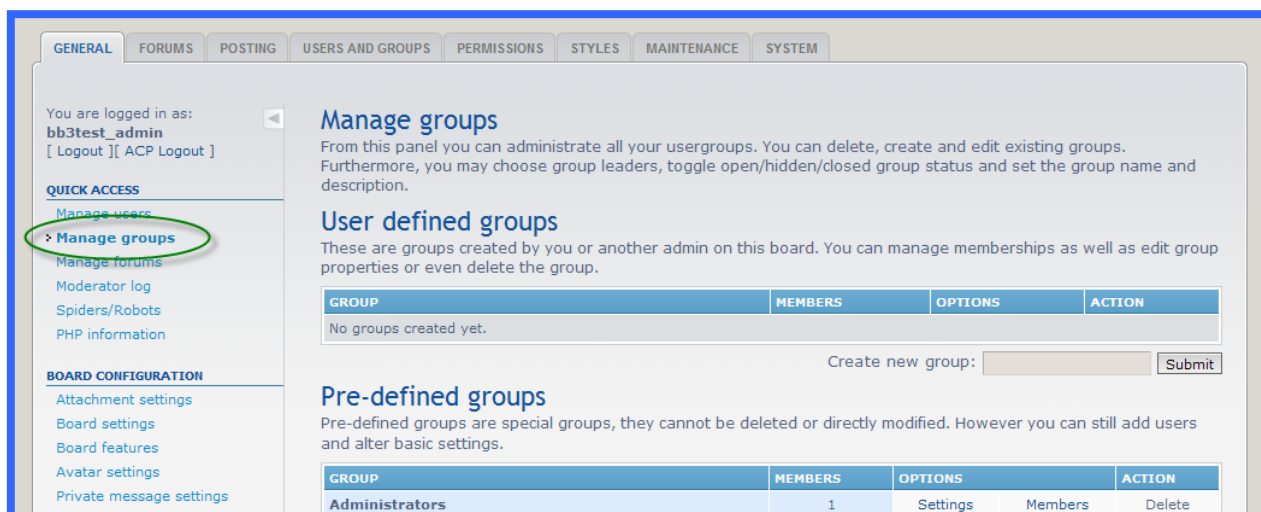
- **By Admin** means that the Administrator must manually activate accounts.
- **By User** will generate an automatic email with a link that the user must click to activate the account.
- **None** means that the account is active upon completion of the registration.
- **Disable** means that no new registrations are allowed.
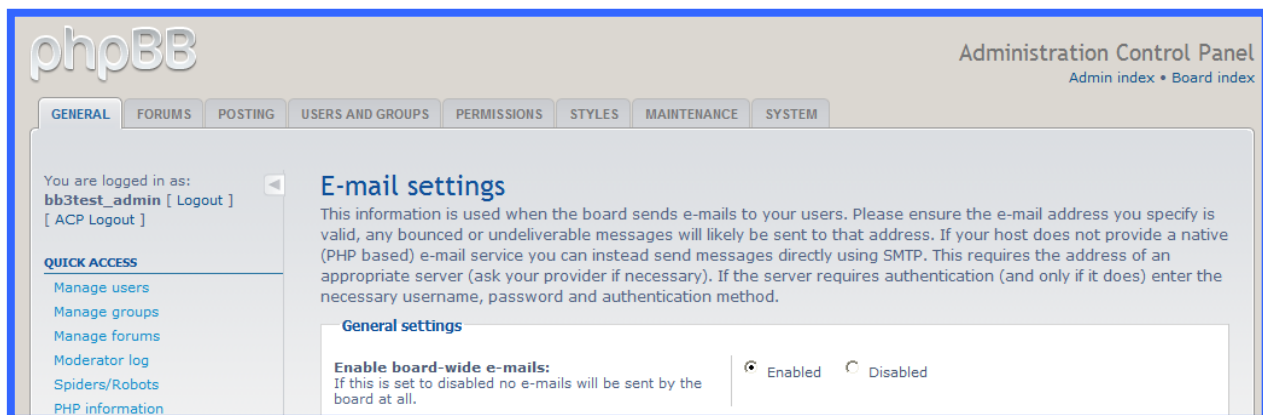
Email Settings

Here, you can configure the information that is used when your board sends out emails to your users. Emails can be sent by using either the native, PHP-based email service, or a specified SMTP server. If you are not sure if you have an SMTP server available, use the native email service. Ask the CEP Team for further details. Some of the setting options are:

- **Enable board-wide emails**: If this is set to disabled, no emails will be sent by the board at all.

- **Users send email via board**: If this is set to enabled, a form allowing users to send emails to each other via the board will be displayed, rather than an email address.

- **Email function name**: If you are using the native, PHP-based email service, this should be the name of the email function. This is most likely going to be "mail".

- **Email package size**: This is the number of emails that can be sent in one package. This is useful for when you want to send mass emails, and you have a large amount of users.

- **Contact email address**: This is the address that your board's email feedback will be sent to. This is also the address that will populate the "From" and "Reply-to" addresses in all emails sent by your board.

- **Return email address**: This is the return address that will be put on all emails as the technical contact email address. It will always populate the "Return-Path" and "Sender" addresses in all emails sent by your board.

- **Email signature**: This text will be attached at the end of all emails sent by your board.

- **Hide email addresses**: If you want to keep email addresses completely private, set this value to Yes.

Managing Groups

There are two types of groups. Pre-defined groups are available by default. You *cannot* delete them, but you can modify their attributes and permissions, and assign group leaders. User defined groups are created by the Administrator. Any number may be created. Unlike the default groups, they can be removed.

The six pre-defined groups are:

Administrators: Contains all of the designated administrators. All founders are administrators, but not all administrators are founders.

Bots: This group is meant for search engine bots and spiders. For more information on managing settings for each bot, talk to the CEP team.
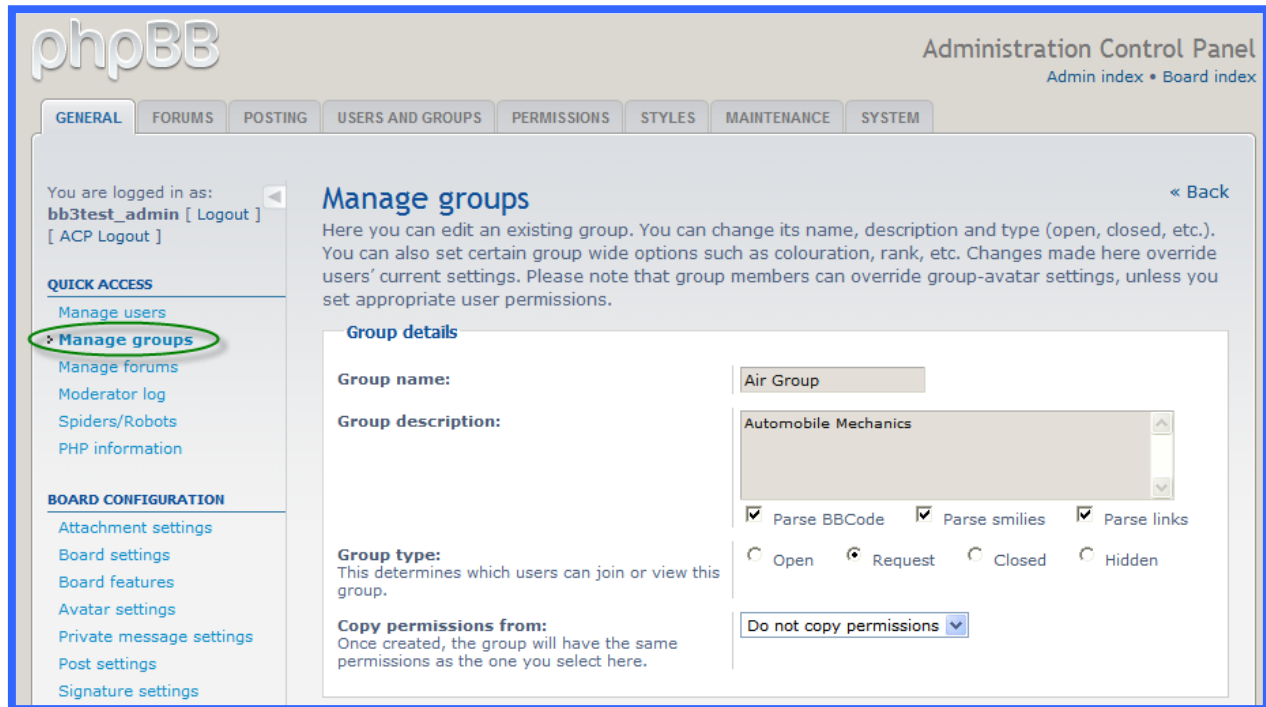
Global Moderators: Users that have been granted moderator permissions for every forum in your board.

Guests: Visitors to your board who aren't logged in.

Registered users: Visitors who have registered as members by providing the required information, and agreeing to the terms of use. Users that register are automatically added to this group.

Registered COPPA Users: Registered users in the U.S.A. under the age of 13, who have parental permission to be members. They fall under the COPPA (Child Online Privacy Protection Act). Carefully managing the permissions given this group is important in protecting these users. COPPA doesn't apply to users living outside of the U.S.A.

Group management activities include assigning members, attaching groups to specific forums, promoting group leaders, and changing their permissions and attributes (description, colour, rank, avatar, and so forth).

Group Attributes

A list of some attributes a group can have:

- Group name
- Group description: A description that will be displayed on the group overview list.
- Group type: Open, by request, closed, or hidden.
- Display group in legend: This will enable the display of the name of the group in the "Who is Online" list.
- Group private message limit per folder: This setting overrides the per-user folder message limit. A value of "0" means the user default limit will be used.
- Group color: The name display color for a member for whom the group is set as the default.
- Group rank: A rank that will display below the name of a member that has this group as the default. An individual rank change will override the group setting.
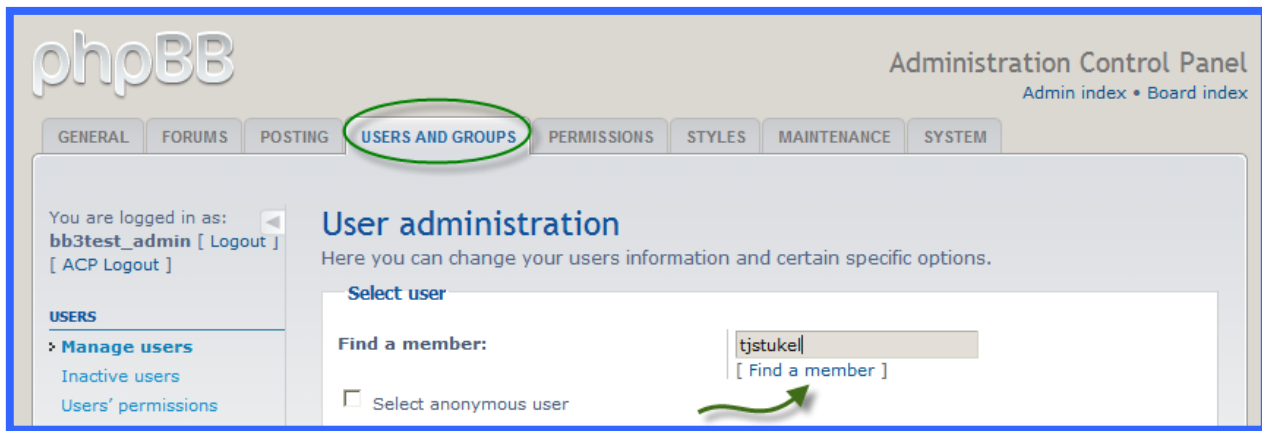
Managing Users

Users are the basis of your forum. Click on the **Users and Groups** tab. Type in the username of the member whose information, group assignments, and settings you wish to manage. Or, click on **[Find a Member]** below the textbox and follow the steps necessary to find and select a user. If you want to manage the information and settings for guests at the individual level, check the box labeled **Select Anonymous User** (any visitor who is not logged in is set as the Anonymous user).

Once you have selected an option, click **Submit**.
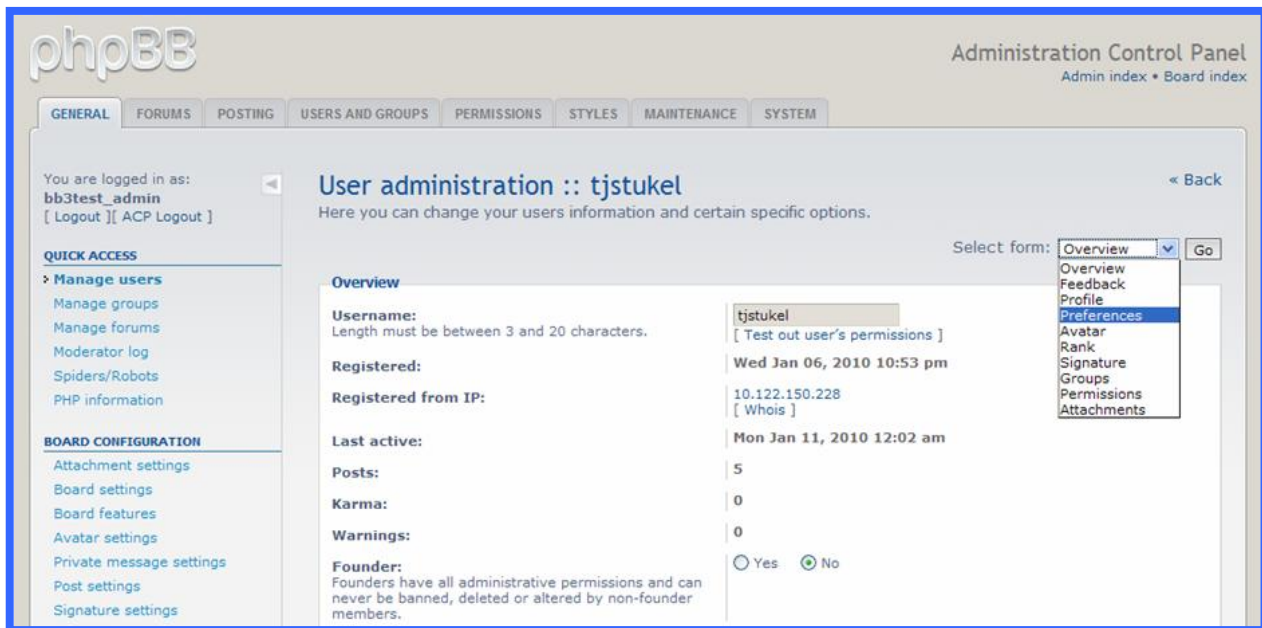
User Overview

This page displays all of the general information and the current settings for the selected user. Clicking the drop-down menu at the upper right reveals ten areas available to check on and modify information and settings, including profiles, feedback, ranks, permissions, and groups assigned.

Moderators

Moderators are users who have been given special permissions. They can have the authority to edit or delete posts and lock, unlock, move, delete and split topics in the forum they moderate. Generally, moderators are present to prevent users from going off-topic or posting abusive or offensive material.

My Dashboard

The *My Dashboard* tab will only appear on the Storefront after a product has been provisioned through APPS.gov Now at https://citizen.apps.gov/index.php.

This Storefront tab allows a system administrator access to a summary of provisioned products. From here you can view a variety of statistics and application metric graphs by clicking the "Go To My Metrics" link at the right of each listed product (see below).

NOTE: These graphs may change in upcoming 2010 releases.

Appendix A: Useful Links

http://www.phpbb.com/support/documentation/3.0/

phpBB's own documentation. Their home page also has links to topic-oriented discussion forums.

http://www.forumbite.com/tutorials/phpbb3-admin/

Very useful tutorials on a wide range of specific forum administration topics.

http://forum.webcontent.gov/?page=about_forum

A government discussion forum for web managers.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization

A comprehensive discussion of SEO history and techniques.

http://blog.phpbb.com/2008/07/01/the-role-of-the-administrator-when-opening-a-forum/#more-4

A good administrative tip blog with a comment section.

http://www.keywordperformance.com/

Useful information about search engine optimization.

http://www.commenthut.com/

Free open-source software to help generate backlinks.

Appendix B: Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

What is Search Engine Optimization?

In a nutshell, Search Engine Optimization is the process of making a web site search engine-friendly through HTML manipulation, so that search engine spiders can crawl every page of the site and return the web site to its index. With that being said, there are actually many more variables involved in getting high rankings. In fact, high-quality search engine optimization is based on page coding and off-site marketing in the form of links.

Getting into the Search Engine

There are two basic ways for your site to be added to a search engine, depending on which engine is targeted. One is to submit your site to the search engine. With some engines, such as Google, the submission is free, but sometimes this method requires a submission fee for each page. The second option is more natural, and consists of getting your site linked to from other reputable sites on the web. This allows the spiders to use those sites to find yours.

Getting rankings

Once your site has been added to the search engine's index, you can begin optimizing (optimizing before submission would be even better). The most basic optimization consists of concentrating on your Meta Tags, Title Tag, content and links. The Meta Tags tell the spiders what your site is all about. Many Meta Tags can hold a variety of very specific information, from who the author of the site is to what language the site is in, or whether or not the spider should follow the links on the page. The content on your web site should be original and thorough. Try to have at least 300-500 words on your web page and make sure you target your core keywords repeatedly. You should also get your site linked with as many sites as you can. This will build your popularity on the web and, in the eyes of engines such as Google, the more relevant you are to the rest of the web the more important you are to their index. In short, the higher your site will be ranked.

There are no magic solutions to search engine rankings. Many things can help your placement, but, in the end, good lasting rankings will come from a lot of hard work.

Optimizing the Title Tag for Search Engine Optimization

What is a Title Tag?

A Title Tag is a piece of HTML code that describes specific web page content through a keyword query that a person types into a search engine. Title Tags are a very important guide for all search engines in determining what is in the content of a web page. Creating a relevant Title Tag is one of the most important variables in achieving high search engine positioning.

View your Title Tag

You can view the Title Tag in the source code of a web page or at the top of your browser window. If you are interested in viewing the Title Tag through the source code simply click on *view* from the menu at the top of your browser then click on *source* and open the window for full view. You will find the Title Tag in the head section of the source code along with your Meta description tag and Meta keyword tag.

What should your Title Tag contain?

Consider your Title Tag as a representation of your core keywords--the most important services and offerings. Make sure that core keywords relating to the product or service you are providing stand out in the title of your index page before anything else. If you are promoting several products and services *always* utilize the Title Tag on each individual URL for its specific keyword(s) and keyword phrases.

You can brand your company's name through keyword density in the Title Tag as well. By including your company name you can establish popularity, branding your company for specific products and services that you offer. With popularity, the name of your company can become a regular search term within the search engines.

How long should your Title Tag be?

It is important to consider the Title Tag's character count. We at Keyword Performance believe that Title Tags should span no less than six words and no more than twelve, resulting in a range of about fifty to eighty characters. This includes spaces, hyphens, commas, etc. This will allow the search engine to utilize this information effectively. Don't overdo the keyword density by cramming in more information than a search engine will scan.

If you offer multiple products or services, don't worry that a search engine will miss something if all the relevant keywords aren't stuffed into one tag. Obviously, you will have other sub-pages built into your site with the specifics, and the search engines will also scan those tags. Each search engine has its own tag-scanning length limitation. For an average person using a search engine, having too many phrases can sometimes confuse the way the search result is displayed. Building a strong Title Tag will increase your visibility on multiple search engines.

Optimizing the Meta Description Tag for Search Engine Optimization

The Meta Description Tag:

The Meta Description Tag is another important and powerful META variable to include when building a strategic Search Engine Optimization strategy. The Meta Description Tag, like the Title Tag, is viewed in a SERP (better known as a Search Engine Results Position) when a person views a search result. The description is another important tag in achieving top search engine placement.

View Your Meta Description Tag:

You can view your Meta Description Tag in the source code by simply going to the menu at the top of your browser and clicking on *view*. Scroll down the options and click on *source,* then open the window for a full view. The Meta Description Tag is in the Head area just like the Title Tag and Meta Keyword Tag.

What should your Meta Description Tag contain?

The description should be written as a powerful on-point marketing statement. Include important keywords that will be found within the content of the webpage. Many people try spamming keywords in this area, mashing words together than don't make a coherent sentence. When building descriptive content, it is important to create a relevant sentence that includes the most important keywords and keyword phrases AND makes sense. Remember, the description is also viewed in the search engine results pages (SERP) and will be seen by the user.

Our opinion at Keyword Performance is that a description should contain twelve to twenty-four words or approximately one-hundred and fifty to one-hundred and eighty characters. Having a giant description really is not going to hurt you, but if a search engine is not going to read past a predetermined character count, it makes no sense to add more.

Optimizing the Meta Keywords Tag for Search Engine Optimization

What is a Meta Keywords Tag?

The Meta Keywords Tag does not weigh as heavily as the Title Tag or Meta Description Tag, but is still relevant within the use of Search Engine Optimization. The Meta Keywords Tag should consist of specific words and/or phrases that relate to your web page topic. These words and phrases are commonly referred to as your "keywords" and "key phrases".

How can I view My Meta Keywords Tag?

You can find the Meta Keywords Tag in the Head section of your code, normally below the Title Tag and Meta Description Tag. You can view your Meta Keywords Tag in the source code by going to the menu at the top of your browser and clicking on *view*. Scroll down your options and click on *source,* then open the window for a full view. The Meta Keywords Tag is in the Head area just like the Title Tag and Meta Description Tag.

How should I place my Meta Keywords Tag?

Within this Meta Tag, list all your keywords and key phrases separated by commas with no spaces. The keywords should list in order of importance (i.e. topics on your page, and then keyword frequency. Remember to include any variations of a keyword, singular and plural versions, and synonyms (different words that mean the same thing). You should not repeat a keyword more than 3 to 4 times within this tag, including variations. Over-use of this tag is frowned upon by search engines and considered spam.

Misconceptions

Long ago, the Meta Keywords Tag, a staple for many search engines, was a major factor in extracting relevant search terms from websites. As the internet built popularity over the 1990's, people realized that they could manipulate search engine technology to generate spam, and get results for terms that were not relevant to a particular type of product, service, information, etc . Those days are long gone.

We still see the overuse of keywords in this tag, and we still see people that think that adding keywords repeatedly, or capitalizing some of them, will make a big difference. FORGET IT! It doesn't work. We aren't saying that the Meta Keywords Tag can't be used for optimizing a website, just that it doesn't weigh as heavily as it once did.

Reciprocal Linking

Many people today are still using programs like Zeus to build large quantities of reciprocal links to their websites. In most cases, these programs don't really help the process of building a great reciprocal link campaign. The use of these programs usually results in link farming, which refers to a massive reciprocal linking of websites that really don't pertain to any industry and/or are not related to each other. A good reciprocal link could be described as two sites with related topics and links to each other. Quality search engines like Google are adding filters to their algorithms to combat spammers that clog search results with irrelevant information and link farms.

Finding good link partners

With billions of websites making up the World-wide Web, your first question is probably going to be "Where do I start?" (Good question!). If you asked yourself this question before you read it, then you most likely already understand that there are sites you should link to and sites you shouldn't. Your search for good link partners should start with educating yourself on the who's who of your industry on the web. Use a few search engines to find other websites related to your industry. Run some searches using your researched keywords and click through some of the sites that appear in the results. Next, critique the sites you view. Are they well written? Is there an abundance of good content? Is this a site that you would want to suggest to someone in a conversation? Are they a reputable business? Lastly, scan around their site for a links page. Do they offer reciprocal links? Sometimes you will find forms to fill out to submit your site. These forms get submitted to the webmasters and a review of your site will take place. Upon review, the Webmaster will either accept or decline your link to their page. If there is no form for links, look for an email address to contact the Webmaster directly.

Receiving Reciprocal Links

Now that you know how to find good links, where do you put the reciprocal links on of your site for your link partners? As you would assume, create a links page. This page should consist of the outbound links to your linking partners. You can chose to create a form for other people to offer their site for review as you might of done, or simply add an email address them to contact you. The amount of links that you have on your links page should not be excessive. In fact, in the eyes of search engines, like Google, it is not about how many links you have but how many are quality links. Do not bother linking to sites that are not reciprocating back to you on your links page. If you have relevant information that you wish a visitor to view, then add a link to the page of your site that the information pertains to. Your links page should be respected, as you do not want to just link to every website out there, nor do you want to be considered a link farm. Remember: five good links are better than fifteen weak ones.

Keyword Performance hopes you have found this information helpful in building an effective search engine optimization marketing strategy. Feel free to utilize any other information within our website to help with a better understand and maximize your search engine performance.

http://www.keywordperformance.com/

Appendix C: Backlinks

Backlinks, or inbound links, are links to your website from other websites, usually related to yours in some way. They are useful tools for good Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The search engines find a link to your site on another site, and automatically follow it. Your site is then indexed without the necessity of manually entering your information into each search engine. Backlinking is the preferred indexing method.

Backlink Structure

A backlink is basically a URL with identifying text or an image added. Make sure that the link is specific to the desired location, i.e. the front page, or a specific article or blog post. The link will need a keyword that is relevant, preferably one that is not in the title of your blog, article, or website. Search engines will already see the title in the URL.

A backlink looks like this:

<A HREF= https://forum.citizen.apps.gov/yourforumname >keyword(s)</A>

The hyperlink produced will look like this: keyword(s).

Basic Rules

• Include key words or phrases in link text (or in html tags ALT & TITLE in an image backlink).
• Keep link text as short as possible.
• Locate keyword and\or key phrases as close to the beginning of the text as possible.
• Use BOLD \ STRONG html tags, if possible.

Generating Backlinks

Backlinks can be included in various places. You can use them in signatures in forum posts, in the resource box attached to posted articles, or, most commonly, in blog comment posts.

There are a several basic ways to build inbound links:

• Exchange links with related websites, known as reciprocal linking.
• Create one-way links by submitting to web directories, getting friendly websites to backlink, or publishing talkbacks on discussion groups & blogs.
• Insert a keyword in the "name" area of a blog comment, and then your URL.
• Publish content-related articles containing hyperlinks (either in the text itself or in your signature).
• Find sites to contact directly using third-party keyword search software.