The MasterHam Project

Revitalizing Ham Radio in the Bay Area

# Introduction

My name is Stiv Ostenberg, K9STV, and I consider myself a rookie ham. Due to an unfortunate hand raising incident, I now serve on the board of directors for the Southern Peninsula Emergency Communications System.

In my career as a Sales Engineer at Microsoft, I learned to identify and solve problems with our customers. As a board member, I used the same analysis to see what I could contribute to the club as an officer.

What became immediately obvious was the elephant in the room. Ham Radio has 20 years left to live unless we recruit a new generation of Hams. Our existing systems of recruiting and educating are not sufficient to overcome this problem.

As in my career, I used my own experiences as a template to identify problems. Problems that discouraged me, were probably impacting other new hams.

# Problems

## Clubs

Clubs are the feet on the street for Ham Radio, but not all clubs are the same. As new hams, my wife and I attended our first club meeting, and we were ignored. People formed little cliques, gave us a cold shoulder, and we were so put off that it was 10 years before we went to another club. Clubs like SPECS, while serving a vital function, are also not the best place for a new ham to find what they need. We need a better way for new hams to find the appropriate club to meet their needs.

## Recruiting

Waiting for people to discover Ham Radio and get a license is too slow. We need to get out there and evangelize Ham Radio. Field Day comes but once a year, and is not sufficiently targeted at recruiting. Clubs do not hold recruiting drives.

## Discovery

As a new ham, finding the resources you need to get online is overwhelming. There is too much and not enough information. Finding the right club, choosing a radio, finding people to talk to. I think we lose a lot of hams at this stage.

## Staffing

Ham Radio in the Bay Area is carried on the backs of a small number of volunteers. The number of people willing to serve is small, so what we can accomplish is limited by their bandwidth and resources.

## Education

Seems the only “Education” provided in SCCo is the ARES/RACES training. Perhaps some clubs may provide a wee bit, but I never found or benefitted from it. If Leslie Grimm had not come to help us hook up our packet radio, my Ham Radio would be rotting away in a box in our attic. We need to provide education to get hams on the air, and engaged in fun activities. After they are engaged is a better time for an EmComm upsell.

# Solutions

I have limited resources myself, but I have put together a three part solution to try to address these problems.

## Events

The first pillar of my solution is the use of MeetUp.com to host events. In addition to helping new hams find activities to participate and learn, it also presents a single location to find meetings of all the local clubs. Not only does it help new hams, but being discoverable by the general public means it might also reach new potential recruits.

SPECS has agreed to cover the cost of the MeetUp, and we will grant host access to any club willing to post their meetings and events here.

[Southern Peninsula Emergency Communications System | Meetup](https://www.meetup.com/southern-peninsula-emergency-communications-system/)

Phase One: Phase one action on the MeetUp involves persuading each club to appoint an officer to maintain their presence on the MeetUp. Until I get their buy in, I have to try to coordinateall the events myself which is more prone to error and I am not the appropriate “host” when attendees have questions.

Phase Two: Phase two is more ambitious. I have hosted multiple events myself designed to provide hands on activities for new hams, and a chance to learn. I have also hosted events designed to evangelize ham radio, such as joint events with a hiking group to do a SOTA activation. I hope such activities that exploit shared interest may inspire a new wave of hams.  
I also hope to provide a support system to welcome new hams, offering radio programming

## Communications

Each club has its own method of communication, but it is siloed to that club. We need a method of communication that goes beyond the individual clubs. I have chosen Groups.IO as the best solution because it is also used by SCCo ARES/RACES and it relies on Email which is more globally used than Discord, Teams, or other soutions.

[Announce@SF-Bay-Ham-Radio.groups.io | Home](https://sf-bay-ham-radio.groups.io/g/Announce)

In addition to providing a single location for new hams to join a mail list related to any club they are interested in, I also need a channel to connect with folks who actively choose to participate in various activities or projects rather than spamming people from around the County. I prefer to leave them in control of their communications rather than have me impose by picking folks out of my contact list.

I believe the clubs will benefit by allowing us to share resources relevant to ham radio operators in the area rather than having each club duplicate each others effort. Working together we can accomplish much more.

I hope this channel also allows Clubs to seek aid from the community, rather than just from their membership. This will allow us to share speakers, or get help manning Flea Market stations. It will also allow us to set up public facing ham events at public events (farmers markets? Parades) that are actively designed to entice and recruit new hams.

I am currently on a free 3 month trial. After that I need to find somebody to fund $20 month, + 4 cents per user beyond 500 users. The county Groups.IO has 485 users, so think we are safe saying we will not exceed that for a while. If we do go beyond that, I think the value would be clear.

## Education and resources

The MasterHam resource key;

While there is a ton of information on the Internet, finding what you need may be difficult. Various clubs have an assortment of bits and pieces (like radio config file or cheat sheets) but these are often out of date, or duplicate another clubs efforts.

To try to address this problem, I started with a folder I keep on my PC with all the programs, manuals, cheat sheets, and an offline copy of the SCCo website and expanded it to include other radios and information as I find it. I created a document to explain all the things that are on the Key, as well as a quick guide to local Clubs, Ham Radio Vendors, and useful websites.

The amount of data on this key exceeds 8 gigabytes. It gets updated periodically as I see new updates available. The amount of data makes it too expensive to expose it on the internet to the world as bandwidth caps might kick the clubs into a more expensive hosting tier.

I am currently offering to copy this folder to anybody who finds me at the Flea Market or a Club Meeting. It takes 15 minutes to copy all of it to a key, but I have a box of preloaded keys that I sell for $20.

My goal going forward is to set up an FTP server and give each club a user account that they can use to synchronize with a local copy. Updates will use very little bandwidth compared to a complete copy, and then each club can provide an update to their members.

In addition to being able to keep their members up to date, clubs would also be able to contribute new material that would in turn be distributed to other clubs.

Part of the reason that the key is so large is that the installers for the programs are included. This reflects my experience with EmComm where we need to be prepared to operate during an outage, and therefore having everything you might need in a single offline key is attractive.

In the future I hope to provide a selection of files that can be used to program radios used in the area. In addition to trying to provide that SCCo map, I want a new ham map that provides access to all the Nets and Repeaters where they might actually find people to talk to.