MIGHTY MOUSE

Some Singaporeans have found an easy way to earn a little cash: Sign up with a service that pays them for clicking on online ads.

Melissa Sim

EQUIPMENT engineer Henry Soh has found an easy way of making some extra cash on the side. He is $2,000 richer simply by reading e-mails and viewing online advertisements for half a minute each over the past nine months.

The 30-year-old, who draws a salary of about $3,000, earns the extra cash by signing up with EmailCashPro, a local advertising service which pays members to view online ads.

"It's a side income and it doesn't take much extra effort," he said.

More than 40,000 Singaporeans are taking the same moneymaking route as Mr Soh by signing up with EmailCashPro.

Its managing director, Mr Kenneth Koh, started the service last July to provide a cheaper advertising alternative to companies.

"I realised that one of the most expensive things to do in Singapore is to advertise a product," the 30-year-old said. "Even if you set up a website, it's difficult to get traffic.

Links to ads are sent via e-mail to EmailCashPro members, who earn money by clicking on each link and keeping each ad on their screen for more than 30 seconds.

It is possible that members simply leave the ads on their screen without looking at them, Mr Koh admitted, but he added that members are sent only e-mail messages on products which they have expressed interest in.

Businessman Andy Hun, 35, for example, receives about two e-mail messages a week about home businesses, computers and travel.

He claimed to look at the ads for more than 30 seconds.

"If the subject head is attractive, I'd usually be curious to find out more and go to the site," he said.

Mr Hun, who has earned about $800 since last July, conducts workshops on internet marketing and draws a salary of about $5,000 a month.

But clicking on all links alone will not earn you very much. More money can be made by roping in new members.

Mr Hun and Mr Soh have introduced others to sign up as members. Under the company's referral system, when such members visit ads, the person who brought them in will also earn extra points.

Mr Soh has recruited more than 200 members and Mr Hun has about 160 -- both men have placed ads in forums and classified pages, relying on strangers to join the service under them.

But would advertisers post their ads on such a website if they suspect that the consumer reading the e-mail may be doing it only for the money?

Associate Professor Sunanda Sengupta from the Nanyang Business School at the Nanyang Technological University said: "Yes, there may be false clicks, but on the positive side, this method is very targeted because you have some basic demographic information.

"For example you know that those receiving these e-mails are most probably literate, technologically savvy and you know the age group and gender. That's much better than just random advertising."

Mr Koh said most of his clients are home businesses with small marketing budgets. But the service also has familiar names like DVD rental firm HollywoodClicks and NTUC Club.

NTUC Club's senior manager of corporate marketing, Ms Evelyn Loo, said the service is effective for certain target groups it wants to reach.

For example, NTUC Club used EmailCashPro to reach out to young people and food towers for a Downtown East event called Food Chase, a food-eating competition.

HollywoodClicks said it has brought in about 200 new members.

"It's a side income and it doesn't take much extra effort."

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Melissa Soh (above), an equipment engineer. He has earned $2,000 from viewing ads online.

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