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ELECTRONIC INVESTOR

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Exceptional Site

With some exceptions, this column steers clear of sites that tell you specifically how to invest your money. We're sure these offers crowd your inbox daily, like the one we just now received, proclaiming that, "This could be the next \$17 energy stock for under \$1."

When we do make an exception and cover a site that touts potentially lucrative returns, we do so only if past performance of the individual or service can be tracked. And if there's a wall between commentary and advertising. EquiTrend (www.equitrend.com¹³) fits our criteria.

EquiTrend does one thing: It issues market-direction signals, and, accordingly, posts a buy or sell signal every night; or, quite often, the daily message will tell you to hold. There's some good commentary and editorial material plus good tools on the site, but its raison d'être is to tell whether you should buy or sell. If EquiTrend is projecting a higher market, it will send you a buy/long signal. If the market is trending down, you'll get a sell/short/cash signal. You can employ one of two styles, long only or long and short.

But when it does suggest a position change, this recommended move (and the site recommends that you do your own due diligence) is based on an automated decision-support system, similar in theory to the credit-score programs banks use in deciding whether to make a loan: it's untouched by human hands. Research and development began in 1996, and the system has been issuing real-time market-direction signals since June 2001. Since then, cumulative results are not as spectacular as more recent gains. EquiTrend offers 30 days free. After that, subscriptions are \$49.95 per month or \$449.40 a year.

An independent timer tracking system, TimerTrac.com (www.timertrac.com¹⁴), follows EquiTrend's progress. TimerTrac.com follows a total of 592 signals. TimerTrac.com ranks services based on time periods, asset classes, and frequency of moves. Subscribers (\$74.95 a quarter) have access to several features, like performance charting and tables for multiple timing signals and indexes. You can also look at historical trades for each timer, open one-page overviews with links, and look up timers by class using a terrific directory/screener.

TimerTrac.com collects time-stamped and real-time buy/sell indicators each trading day and ranks performance. We looked up EquiTrend's record for the last year using the S&P 500. With 12 trades, the long and short approach was No. 3, with a return of 28.08%. Long was No. 2, with 16.80%.