



READY, SET, GO:
GETTING YOUR
ONLINE
COMMUNITY
STARTED



Introduction

The most powerful way companies can add value is to provide a place where prospects, customers, and the company itself can interact. That's why online communities have quickly become one of the most powerful tools for allowing prospects, customers, and companies to engage with each other.

These communities typically focus on topics relevant to the company's target market, ranging from newsworthy issues to product-specific questions. It's a place where members can ask and answer questions, share valuable content, and interact socially.

Benefits of Online Communities

Your online community can be one of your most powerful assets. It has the potential to impact a range of strategic business objectives. There are three objectives in particular that an online community can support.

1) Revenue growth - More and more buyers are looking to their peers when it comes to making purchasing decisions. Furthermore, existing customers that are truly engaged with a company will spend more money with that company.

2) Customer satisfaction - Companies that engage their customers socially tend to receive higher customer satisfaction ratings and experience lower churn.

3) Product development - Companies with online communities are building better products because they are able to include customers in the product development process.

These are extremely compelling benefits that span sales, marketing, customer service, and product development.

Your online community can be one of your most powerful assets.

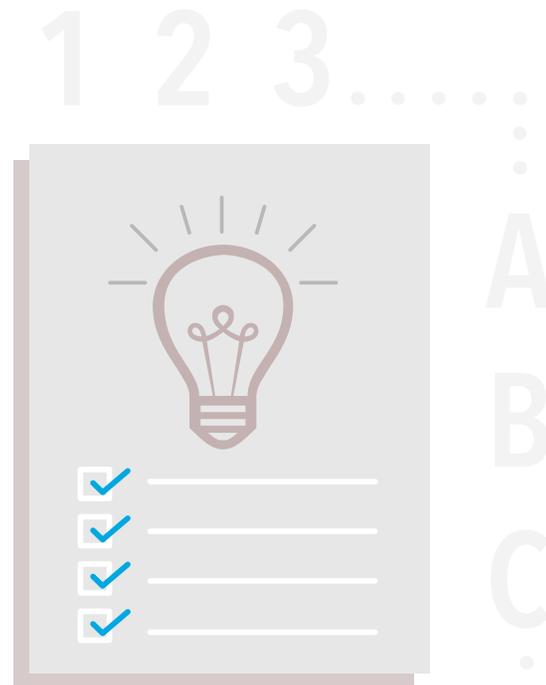


Getting Started is Getting Easier

At the same time, it's never been easier to create an online community. There are a few factors that are making it easy for companies to build their online communities. These include:

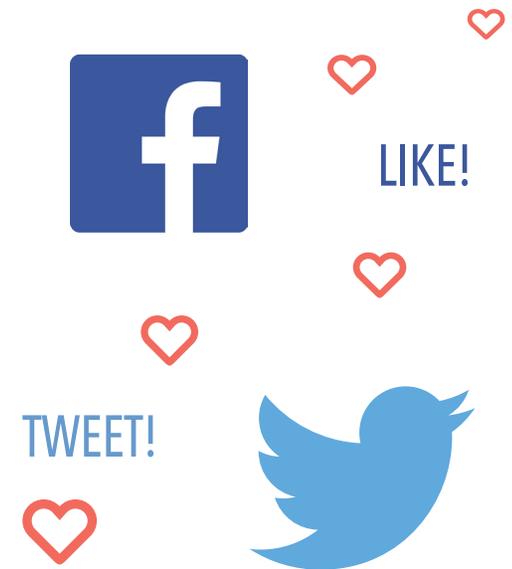
- 1) Established best practices** - There are now some well-known best practices associated with designing, building, and managing online communities.
- 2) Easy-to-use technology** - The technology that powers online communities has become feature rich and easy-to-use.
- 3) Conditioned social behavior** - Finally, most people have now had a social experience online. It might be via a major social platform like Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, but people are conditioned to participate in social communities online.

Because of these established best practices, easy-to-use technology, and the proven results associated with communities, it's easy for companies to get started.



EASY AS

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An Important First Step: Hire (or Designate) a Community Manager

The Community Manager is the functional owner of the community. They are responsible for day-to-day management of the community and making sure that it meets the company's business objectives. This person typically resides in either the marketing or customer service organization, again, depending on the community's primary objectives.

When launching a new online community, it's essential to have a designated community manager (or managers). They should be passionate about the company and its customers. They should also be naturally social and able to drive real engagement with prospects and customers alike. Community managers have one or more of the following responsibilities:

- **Business planning** - Identify key business objectives that the community will support.
- **New member recruitment** - Identify and recruit new members to join the community.

- **Community seeding** - Seed activity by publishing posts, asking questions, and sharing content that is designed to spark member activity.
- **Member engagement** - Engage members by reaching out to them via email and the phone if need be.
- **Metrics and optimization** - Measure the effectiveness of the community by tracking and optimizing key metrics such as number of members and contributions per member.
- **Community liaison** - Act as the liaison between community members and other parts of the organization such as support, product, and sales

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The 10 Point Quick Start Checklist

✓ 1) Develop a 90 day plan

Specify the business objectives that your community will support. These objectives are typically related to sales, marketing, and customer service. Your plan should also identify what resources you'll require to make your community a success. Most importantly, identify what you'll do in the first 90 days to make the community a success. See Page 6 for more details on a 90 day plan.

✓ 2) Build a lightweight team

The community will need the support an executive sponsor, Community Manager, and employees. The Community Manager will spend the most time managing the community, but assigning an executive sponsor and recruiting co-workers to participate are critical to success.

✓ 3) Select a technology provider

The technology you choose to power your community will define many of its attributes. Choose a community platform that provides members with a great user experience and Community Managers with easy setup and administration.

✓ 4) Build the community

Once you've selected a technology, you can start to build out the community. Make sure you understand how people become members and the features that will drive real engagement in the community. You should also spend time ensuring that the community will incorporate your branding guidelines.

✓ 5) Recruit your initial members

Identify and personally recruit approximately 20 members who you think will be active participants in the community. Some of these people can be employees, but most should be existing customers who are passionate about your business. Make sure they have a proclivity to use social media.

✓ 6) Seed activity

Even the most successful communities didn't start from scratch. There's almost always someone who is seeding activity in the community, driving participation and engagement. The Community Manager should seed the community with posts, questions, and other forms of content every day.

Identify and personally recruit approximately 20 members who you think will be active participants in the community.



The 10 Point Quick Start Checklist

✔ 7) Engage early members

It's also critical that you engage members in a one-to-one fashion, particularly in the early days. Use email and even the phone to make people aware of key interactions in the community so that they can join in the conversation.

✔ 8) Collect feedback from members

Collect qualitative feedback from some of the initial members. Make sure that you identify the specific areas that they are deriving value from. You should also make sure that you identify areas that you could improve.

✔ 9) Review results

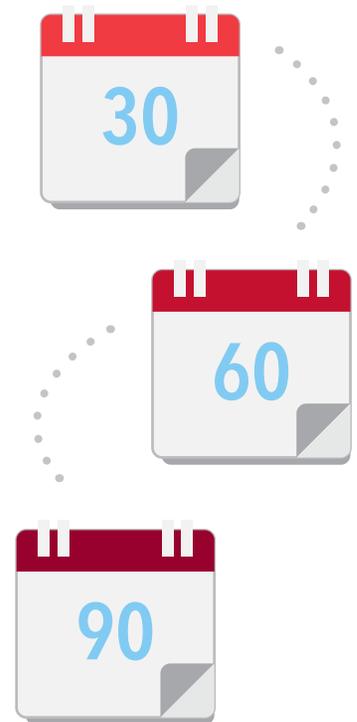
After 30, 60, and 90 days, review the results of your efforts. Has membership grown? Are you seeing real participation and engagement? Is there a lot of content being generated? If you like what you see, get ready to roll the community out to a larger audience.

✔ 10) Promote the community

Now it's time to promote the community to a larger audience. As you reach out to a larger group of customers, prospects, employees, and partners, remember that you already have an engaged community in place.



After 30, 60, and 90 days, review the results of your efforts.



Key Elements of Your 90 Day Plan

The best online communities start with a good plan. The plan doesn't need to be long, but it should specify strategic objectives, key processes and activities, the organization, technology, and metrics. It should also detail who the target members are and why they will find value in the community.

Define your members

It's critical that you understand who your target community members are. Your current customers are a great place to start. Conduct a handful of interviews with them to make sure that you understand who they are, what they care about, and how they would derive the most value from your community. Make sure that you capture this information in your plan.

You can develop personas for each of the major types of people you'd like to join your community. Developing personas for your current customers and prospects

can be helpful. Just make sure that your personas capture specific information about why and how the member will use the community.

Define processes and activities

Your plan should specify the standard processes and activities that you'll engage in to make your community a success. A key objective for your community should be to make it scalable and efficient. Standard processes and activities are essential to this.



Focus on two types of activities:

1. What will you do to **identify, recruit, and onboard** new members?
2. Once someone is a member, what will you do to **continuously engage** them?

For example, you may determine that engagement will depend on a weekly community newsletter or personalized emails.

Take the First Step

DNN provides an online community solution called [Evoq Social](#). As a first step, we recommend a consultation with one of our knowledgeable social specialists. They can help map your organization's needs to create an online community strategy.

Contact us today to arrange a consultation:

✉ **Email:** sales@dnnsoftware.com

☎ **Phone:** 650.288.3150

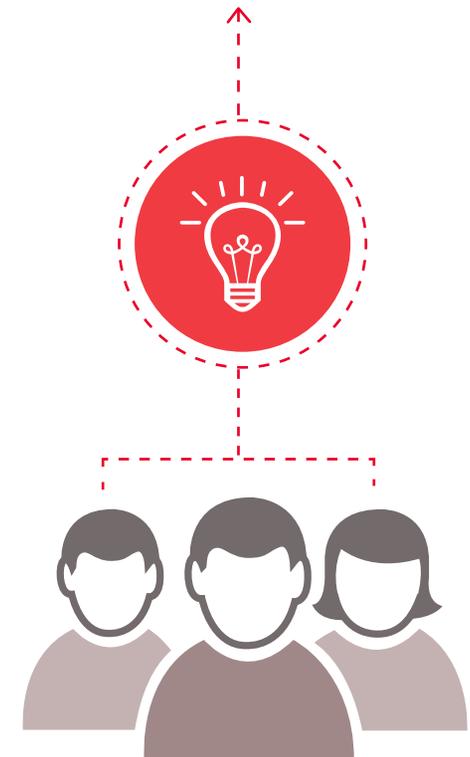
Related Reading

Based on your interest in online communities, we recommend that you check out the following resources:

1. Research Report: [The State of Community Management 2014](#)
2. Blog Series: [Incredibly Valuable Ways Marketers Can Use Branded, Online Communities](#)
3. Blog Series: [How to Create Sustained Engagement in Online Communities](#)
4. Blog Post: [7 Traits to Screen for When Hiring a Community Manager](#)

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About DNN

DNN provides a suite of solutions for creating rich, rewarding online experiences for customers, partners and employees. DNN products and technology are the foundation for 750,000+ websites worldwide. In addition to our commercial CMS and social community solutions, DNN is the steward of the DNN Platform Open Source Project.

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