

The **Ultimate** Guide to Social Communities

As an association professional, you may understand the value of engaging members through social media.

But what about through social communities? Are those even valuable? And how are they any different from traditional social media sites?



There are a LOT of questions surrounding social communities, so today, we're breaking it all down in our [Ultimate Guide to Social Communities](#).

We'll be talking about how social communities differ from traditional social media sites, how to get your organization's social community up and running, and tips and best practices for increasing engagement through online social communities.

What are social communities?

First and foremost, it's important to note that social communities do not try to compete with traditional social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Instead, they typically offer a members-only forum for discussions, pictures, and sharing.

“Sounds a lot like Facebook to me,” you might be thinking. Well, consider it like this. Traditional social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are more public-facing platforms. They're designed to help you showcase your organization's value and attract new members. Social communities, on the other hand, are designed for your members' eyes only. They're meant to engage your existing members and serve as a really fun perk to your organization's membership.



The features

Best of all, social communities are designed to help increase online member engagement. In fact, they have several unique features that contribute to just that. Some of the most common components of social communities include:

Member profiles

Just like traditional social media sites, social communities allow members to create personalized profiles with pictures and bios.

Messages capabilities

In the spirit of networking, social communities typically allow for one-on-one messaging between members.

Online forums

Think of online forums as a members-only discussion page. Again, these allow for members to easily communicate and share information with each other.

User-created circles

Circles are the shining star of social communities. They allow for members to quickly and easily share pictures and information related to a particular topic.

Still not convinced your organization needs a social community?

Well, consider this: According to Leader Networks, members who engage with their association via a private, members-only community are more likely to renew. That alone is reason enough to give social communities a shot.

How to get your social community up and running

Setting up a social community is really only half the battle. Once it's live, you then need to encourage your members to use it. If the latter seems like a bit of a struggle, here are four ways to kickstart your organization's social community:

1

Select engagement ambassadors

In order to get your social community up and running, consider selecting a few people from within your organization to act as engagement ambassadors. These individuals should post several times per day within your social community and seed various questions to get members talking. Using engagement ambassadors to populate your social community will create a lively vibe to entice hesitant members.



Offer exclusive content

One of the best ways to attract people to your organization's social community is by offering up content that can't be accessed anywhere else. This could include in-depth eBooks, recorded webinars, or even a few short videos. Whatever it is though, make sure it's valuable and reinforces your social community's overall purpose.

3

Position your social community as part of the member experience

This is an important step that many associations often overlook. Your social community should be an extension of your organization’s overall value proposition. When a new member joins your organization, make it a point to introduce your social community as part of the the new member onboarding process. The more emphasis you place on it, the more likely members are to follow suit.



4

Reward members for contributions

Getting members to talk to each other is a real win. So when one of your members contributes to your organization’s social community, especially for the first time, it’s important to reward them. Now this could be something as simple as a “Thanks for joining in!” or it could mean sending them a free t-shirt or a discount code on your next event. Either way, it’s important to acknowledge your active and engaged members.

Increasing engagement through social communities

Now if you make it a point to create an online social community, you want to make sure you get the most out of it, right? We totally understand. So to help you out, here are four tips for increasing engagement through social communities:

1

Take advantage of status updates and wall posts

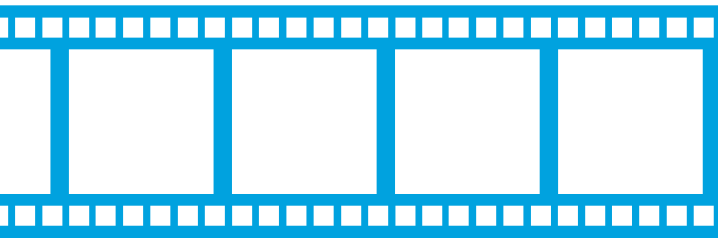
One way to spur conversation and really generate online member engagement is by taking advantage of status updates and wall posts. As an association leader, you should be posting status updates on a fairly regular basis. Two to three times a week is a pretty good number - it shows that you're engaged with the community, without being a total pain. And if you see other members posting within your social community, be sure to comment back. This shows that you're actively listening to what it is they're saying and helps build that overall sense of community.

2

Embrace photo galleries

Photo galleries are a great way to showcase your organization's personality. They show that you're a real person, and not just a faceless organization. Plus, by making it a point to post pictures of your own, you're setting an example for what you'd like your members to do. The more pictures you post, the more likely they are to contribute.





3

Experiment with short videos

Remember, not everyone likes to consume content in the same form. Rather than just posting status updates and wall posts, try throwing in a few short videos as well. This may encourage some of your more visual members to engage with you.

Not sure what to even film short videos about? Here are a few ideas:

- Interview the founder of your organization. People love to know how things all began.
- Talk about an upcoming event or conference. Provide your members with packing tips or advice for conference newbies.
- Repurpose an existing blog post. Take out the top three bullet points and convert them into video form.
- Put together a compelling holiday video. (Publix's holiday commercials immediately come to mind.)

4

Offer topic-specific, opt-in e-lists

E-lists are great for members who don't log in to their accounts very much. They allow for members to still receive updates without having to log in or take any action.

Now let's rewind for a second. What are e-lists in terms of social communities? Well, just as a member can subscribe to your organization's newsletter, they can also subscribe to the different components of your organization's social community. So for example, if someone uploads a photo to one of their circles, all of the people who are in that circle and subscribed to that e-list will get an email notification — perfect for encouraging online member engagement.



There you have it!

As you can see, social communities are a great way to engage your organization's membership. From member profiles and circles to online forums and e-lists, there are a multitude of features designed to get your members talking.

Want more tips for engaging your organization's membership?

Check out our free **Member Engagement Guide** here!



◀ Click here to check it out!

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