

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO **Community Management**



A hands-on, practical guide to launching, growing & maintaining your own wildly successful branded online customer community



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What is an online branded community?

It's no secret that communities empower brands. But what are the benefits of building and growing an online community, other than the most obvious perks of product marketing that come to mind? Online customer communities directly inject value into at least three core areas of your business: customer service, product development and—of course—marketing and sales.

Best-in-class branded communities are serving their organizations by lowering service costs and increasing customer retention. But how is it possible for communities to have such a big impact on your customer journey?

Online communities managed well serve as long-term content engines that are based on a one-to-many principle. Every time a user generates new content, it's not only seen by the small group of community members, but by the thousands of other visitors who stumble upon the page in question via a search engine (hi, Google!).

Communities are a powerful engine for the creation, capture, discovery and cultivation of conversations. These conversations provide a new way for people to truly engage with one another about what's important to them and share their opinions and experiences with brands and each other. At the same time, communities create new opportunities for companies to connect with their consumers, develop trust-based relationships, and gain unique customer insights to fuel more effective marketing, sales, and service experiences.

Unlike social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter, online communities are customer networks you own. They are examples of owned media. You can harvest the user-generated content they produce, analyze it, and use it to inform business decisions. Community content and user data can be seamlessly integrated into existing websites, customer portals, mobile apps, and enterprise systems—fully customized according to your branding guidelines. And you can continue to deliver the right social customer experiences for your brand no matter how the social media landscape changes.

What purpose will your community serve?

There are numerous reasons for brands to adopt a community: as a support channel, for marketing and engagement, or to conduct research and co-creation with their customers.

Breakdown of how brands typically use their customer communities



Because they offer so many compelling benefits, communities are powerful drivers of cultural change within organizations large and small. Some successful communities, like that of home audio brand Sonos, have millions of users. Others, like Dutch nonprofit De Kindertelefoon, have user bases in the tens of thousands.

What makes communities so effective is that they infuse conversation into digital brand experiences. The internet offers boundless opportunities to connect with your customers—and communities let brands harness these opportunities within a single platform.

Positive impact at all stages of the customer journey

Customer communities have a role to play at all stages of the customer lifecycle. In the pre-sales phase, for example, having a community Q&A can address prospects' questions and help them make a more informed decision—and purchase!—faster. In the post-purchase phase, communities help you to drive down service costs and improve customer satisfaction by providing customers with a high-quality self-service channel.

Communities add value at all stages of the customer journey



Some extra traffic? Yes, please!

So, not only do communities offer authentic peer-to-peer recommendations and advice, they also help drive potential buyers from Google to your product pages. Research has shown that well integrated customer communities that embed their content across an entire site or app, rather than remaining siloed, help businesses generate extra leads, drive higher conversion and accelerate the online buying cycle.



Communities make it easy for your customers to share information, best practices, and how-to tips with each other, as well as get advice without needing to interact with your agents. On average, 30 people are indirectly helped by any given community answer.

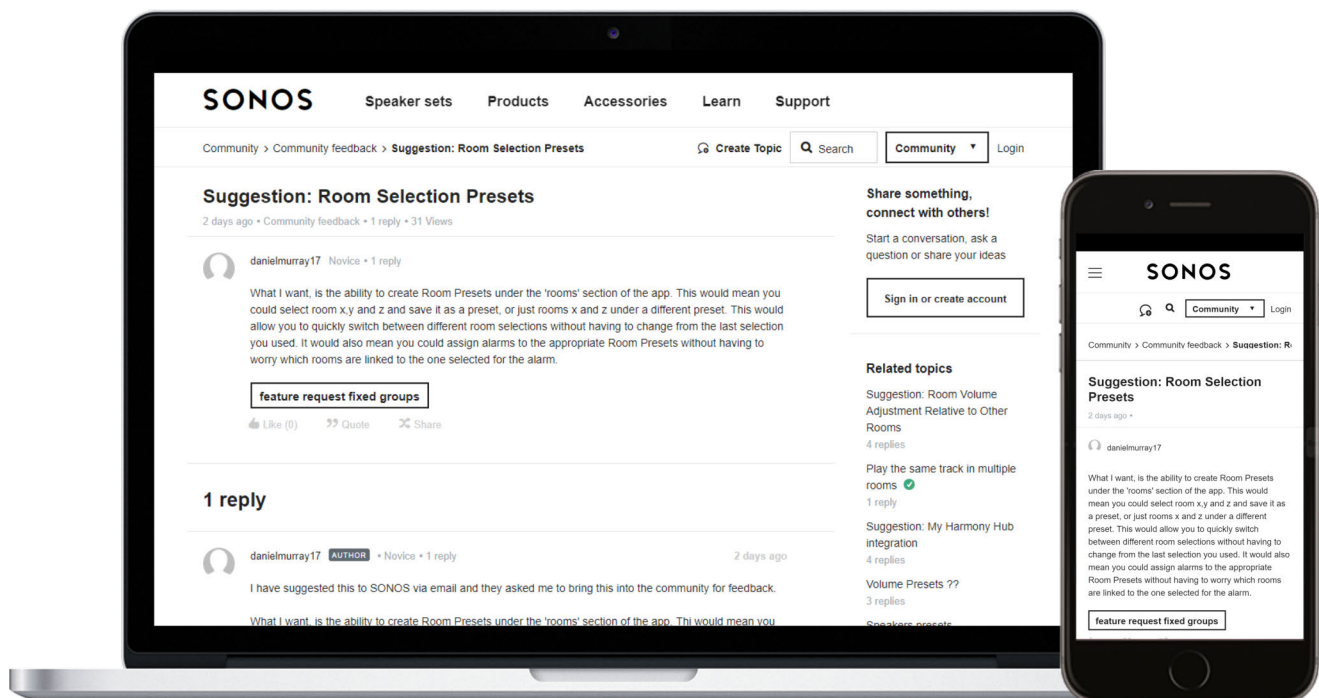
Using your community for ideation & co-creation

Depending on the community objectives your organization has set, you may decide to utilize your customer community for what's known as 'ideation' or 'co-creation'. The purpose of running an ideation initiative is to help your company involve its customers—and in the process, gain social insights, improve products or services, and co-create new products or features with users.

As a community manager you'll play a vital role in managing such an ideation forum or initiative. You'll need to make sure that channels of communication are established internally, with the right departments or areas, as well as externally, with the ideators engaged in the process of proposing ideas, discussing those ideas and voting for their preferred ones.

Creating an ideation forum essentially means that you invite your community members to share an idea. This could be related to a variety of business areas: an idea to improve the company's provision of customer services, the online community itself, or concrete products, processes or marketing campaigns.

Given the many possibilities, it's essential that you have a clear objective for the ideation forum and that you separate ideation forums according to products or departments—the key here is to ensure that each forum gathers ideas in an efficient manner, which allows for a clear process flow of filtering, reviewing and implementing the proposed ideas.



SONOS is using their community as a way to gather feature requests and suggestions from their user base

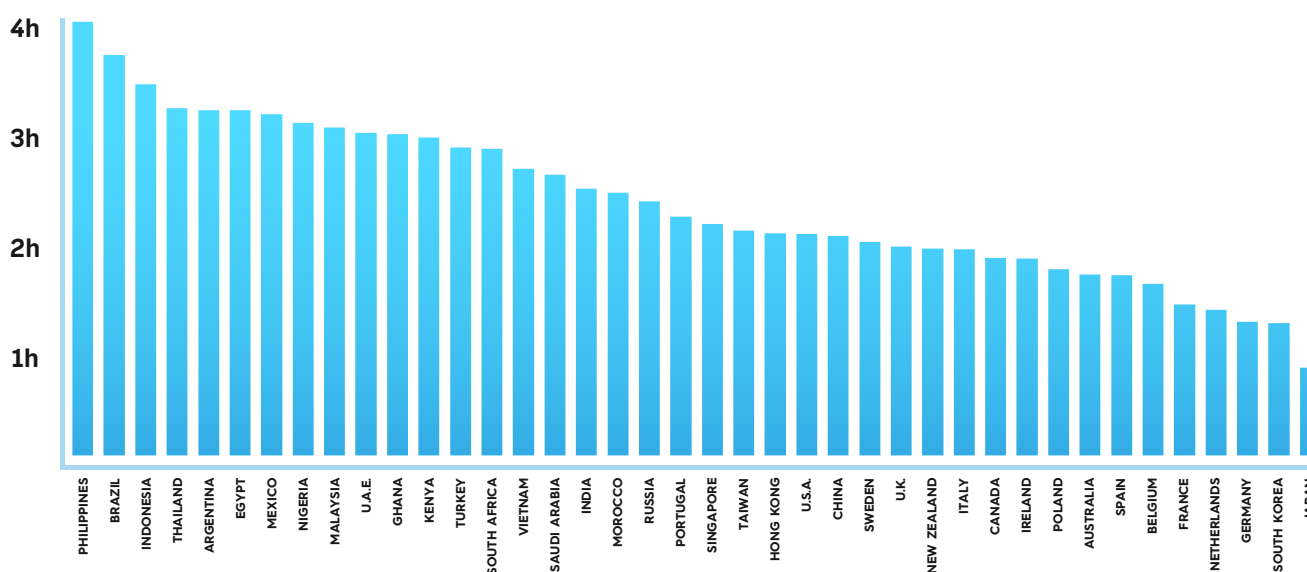
Using your community for customer service

Peer-to-peer conversations make online support better and more scalable, and they offer a human touch that the latest ‘cost-reduction’ technologies like bots and AI will always struggle to replicate—at a fraction of the resource cost of customer service conversations.

The primary reason conversations add value is that they let consumers connect with each other to share advice and guidance. We’ve seen peer connections transform the internet in the last fifteen years. A good example is social media, where peer-to-peer communication is the main driver. Social networks are now the number two leisure activity globally, behind only TV.

Time spent on social media globally

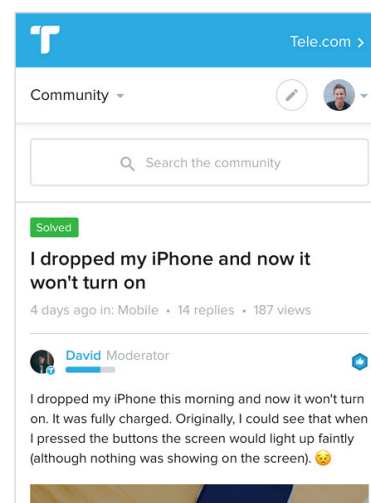
Source: Global Web index, Q2 & Q3 2017, based on a survey of internet users aged 16–64



These kinds of peer-to-peer conversations can greatly enhance the customer service experience. Communities simply give consumers another platform to engage and interact. Communities are especially valuable on mobile—between 60% and 70% of community sessions take place on a mobile device—because many support queries are “in-the-moment”; for example “How do I change my billing address?”.

When a person has an in-the-moment question, they naturally pull out their smartphone and conduct a web search to find an answer. Because community content can rank so highly with Google, a large majority of a community’s traffic typically comes from organic search—usually in the range of 60% to 80%.

Community content can also be infused into other mobile platforms. For example, with the inSided API, brands can inject community posts into apps and responsive websites using embeddable widgets. You could, for example, feature certain conversations in the support pages of your mobile app—or empower users to search your community from within the app. Combine these trends and you see why peer-to-peer conversations make sense for customer support.



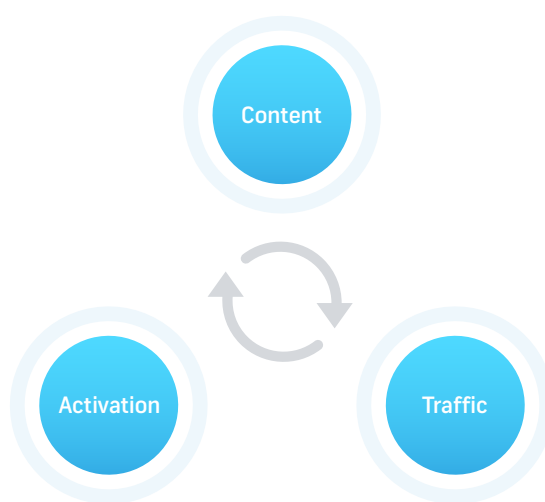
Peer-to-peer conversations supporting customer service initiatives

How communities work: content, traffic & activation

Successful communities immediately begin producing results. Typically, three elements need to come together to get things moving: content, traffic, and activation.

The content-traffic-activation flywheel in customer communities is what ultimately drives long-term value. Regardless of a community's underlying goals, it's important to look at it as a long-term play—an entity that requires care and effort to flourish. With the right strategies in place, its value will only increase as time goes by.

The content-traffic-activation flywheel



Content

Content is—unsurprisingly—what's posted to the community. Early on in a community's life cycle, moderators should be seeding discussions and responding to customer posts, when appropriate. What's important is demonstrating that you're actively involved and encouraging users to participate in conversations. Over time, user-generated content will begin to take center stage and propel your community forward. In the beginning, it's also important for community managers and/or moderators to find the right content structure for the community. Which categories work best for the topics your users are talking about? Are there sub-topics that are proving to be so popular they need their own home within the community?

Traffic

Traffic refers to the flow of visitors to the community from outside sources. The content you create will drive traffic to your community. We've found that content from inside established communities drives millions of relevant impressions each month on search engines, and can give up to four times higher click through rates than paid search activity.

Activation

Activation is all about getting that buy-in from new users and encouraging regular activity on the community. Communities are all about human interaction, so think of activation as analogous to building real relationships. The more you invest, the more you get back. Therefore, make sure that you give people a warm welcome that really motivates them to get involved and participate.

Getting started with your community

Structuring the right team

Your community should be contributing to the positioning and branding of your organization as a whole, and it goes without saying that every user visiting your community should have a positive experience. Your community team's role is to make sure that this is the case. There are many different community management and moderation tasks, which are often being executed in the background. Let's take a look at the most important roles making up a community team:

- ✓ Community managers
- ✓ Moderators
- ✓ Product managers, developers & other staff

So for ongoing community success and effective prioritization and time management, structure your internal community team the right way from the get-go. Depending on the size of your community and the industry you're in, you're going to need a combination of community manager(s) and moderator(s).

There are a couple of key differences between community managers and moderators: firstly, the level of perceived authority amongst community members and secondly, their role in managing the community. A community manager is responsible for creating guidelines, policies, communication plans and reporting programs. Conversely, moderators keep busy enforcing those guidelines and policies, participating in community activity, managing members and maintaining a positive atmosphere.

Here's a breakdown of how the various community roles play out day-to-day:



Community Manager

create guidelines
report community impact back to stakeholders



Moderator

maintain a positive atmosphere
interact with members

Pro tips for community team members

DOs

- ✓ Acknowledge peer-to-peer support
- ✓ Engage with potential super users
- ✓ Welcome new members

DON'Ts

- ✗ Ignore super users
- ✗ Answer questions when users could
- ✗ Break the '24h rule'



How many moderators do you need?

The size of your community team is going to vary dependent on—of course—the size and activity level of the community itself, but also the industry you're in and the audience you're serving.

User questions posted within a B2B software community relating to complex, user-specific challenges are going to require a lot more input from the moderation team than straightforward consumer product questions that can be dealt with using existing knowledge base material.

The rule of thumb we recommend is that one FTE of moderation capacity can handle around 1000 posts or approximately 240 topics per month. This can, of course vary wildly based on factors such as how much content your community team is creating internally, what the peer-to-peer answer ratio is in your community and where your community fits within the maturity lifecycle.

Creating a community content strategy & plan

Planning and executing your content strategy is essential for your community success. A well-planned and executed content strategy really can mean the difference between a lively community and an idle one. There are three strategic aspects to incorporate into your community content strategy:

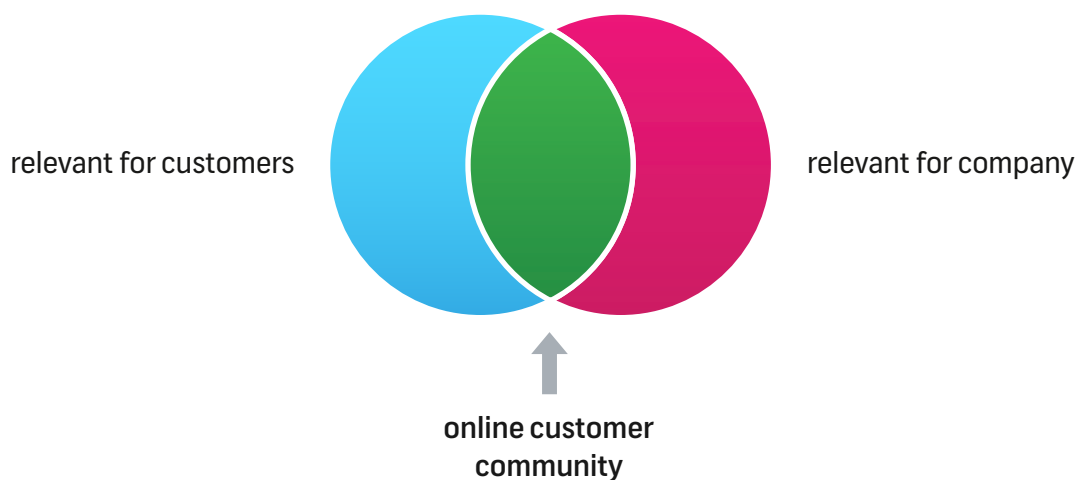
- ✓ Clearly defined community content objectives
- ✓ Well-planned content creation (think: clear categories and a content calendar)
- ✓ Regular content measurement

Let's take a look at how you can harness these three elements to create a great content strategy for your community.

Clearly defined community content objectives

Your community content objectives are of course guided by the ultimate goals your business has for the community itself, but one key goal that every community manager should keep at the forefront of their mind is that the community needs to provide a fun and engaging experience for members.

So how do you make that happen? First, you must know your audience. What are their interests, their quirks and their motivations for being community members in the first place? Use these insights to determine which content types and topics they'll find fun and engaging.



We like to challenge community managers to ask themselves the following question to make sure they're really getting under the skin of their members needs, wants and desires:

If you were buying them a gift, what would you get them?

Think about what type of gift your members would enjoy receiving, and—most importantly—why this would be a great gift for them. How could this gift also represent you as an organization? If you can answer these questions pretty confidently, you're on the right track to figuring out the kind of community content that's going to make your members tick.

Content planning

Determine the crossover of interests between your members and your brand—keep in mind which content topics serve the organization and list any key themes that you do or don't want to talk about as a brand. Take the time now to decide what angle you want the company to take when it comes to any sensitive or controversial topics that may come up within your community.

We've put together some pro tips for planning community content categories:

Start small

Choose no more than 5 content categories to begin with. This allows your organization get clear on your language and tone of voice, as well as manage the community content easily from the beginning. Avoid content categories that could be defined differently by different people - keep it simple and clear. In time, more content categories can be added, and your existing categories can be refined and extended accordingly (for example, an initial category on 'product information' can later be broken down into specific product categories).

Avoid overlapping categories

Make clear distinctions between your chosen categories. Leave no room for confusion. Vague category names such as 'general information' and 'product information' are the worst culprits for this—beware!

Remember, content categories are not topics or subjects

Confusing content categories with topics can occur more easily than you'd expect—especially in product focused communities. Take for instance a category named "running apps for the iPhone 6". Such a category will be exhausted after 10 or 20 topics and will interest only a very small sub section of community members—iPhone 6 users who are not only keen runners but also have a desire to track their running activity. So when defining your categories, ask yourself: 'is this more appropriate as a topic within an existing (or maybe new) category?'

While all your content should—of course—support the main goal(s) of your community, it's also important to make sure there's a good rhythm and cadence to the posted topics, and that these topics vary with a diverse range of messages.

You can liken this to process to the practice of turning the pages of a magazine. Each time a page is turned, you find a new kind of article in a different format from the last. Interviews, rubrics, and reviews come together to form a varied mix within the magazine and keep the reader interested until the very last page.

Keep your tone of voice consistent

While you need to vary the types, formats and themes of your community, remember to keep your tone of voice consistent. Community content should be surprising and appealing, but equally in line with the style of the company. We recommend creating a community style guide to help your community team maintain consistent language, tone and branding. You can also use the style guide to direct certain types of language, angles and topics that should be avoided within the brand community.

Content calendar

For a comprehensive content calendar, use this list to plan each piece of content and get all your ducks in a row before you publish:

- ✓ Topic title and body text
- ✓ Visual materials
- ✓ Type of content
- ✓ Forum
- ✓ Sticky (yes / no)
- ✓ Public tags
- ✓ Who is responsible for creating the topic
- ✓ Deadline for placing it in the community
- ✓ Fixed / flexible deadline
- ✓ Ongoing subject (yes / no)
- ✓ Promotional (yes / no)
- ✓ Social media sharing

An example template for a community content calendar

Posted topics						Engagement after 1 week					Engagement after 3+ weeks				
#	Topic title	Link	Date posted	Forum	Public tags	Update on	Views	Replies	Likes / votes	UCs	Update on	Views	Replies	Likes / votes	UCs
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															

Content measurement

You've defined your content objectives and planned a comprehensive content calendar. Wait, you're not quite done! It's vital to measure success, of course. How is all of this well-planned, strategic community content performing?

You can measure your community engagement, participation and involvement quite easily using KPIs such as shares, views, comments and clicks.

Before you invest time in analyzing and measuring your community impact, align with key stakeholders. Are the metrics you plan on reviewing actually representative of what your team needs to know? A customer service stakeholder will want to hear how the community has improved time to resolution or ticket deflection, whilst a customer retention team will be more interested in seeing NPS score trends in community members over non-community members, for example.

For more detailed advice on creating your content strategy, check out our [Community Content Strategy whitepaper](#).

3, 2, 1... launch! Start small, move fast

One of the biggest mistakes brands make when it comes to launching their new community is taking the “big launch” approach. Community managers often mistakenly believe that an effective community is launched with a big bang—from our experience, this is just not the case.

A community should grow organically, so it doesn't become self-cannibalizing. The way to enable this is by taking a staggered launch approach using the following steps:

- ✓ Send a VIP invite to a small number of brand advocates
- ✓ Next, expand these invitations to a wider network
- ✓ Allow the community to gain its own steam
- ✓ Enable founding members to feel ownership and responsibility for the successful management of the community
- ✓ Only later, open the community up to new members

Richard Millington, one the leading industry experts on community management and founder of Feverbee, believes that the key to a successful, sustainable and long-term community is to ‘start small’, and our experience at inSided shows the same.

Don't invest budget or resources into a ‘big bang’ style launch – you may see a larger number of initial members, but you'll struggle to maintain engagement in the long-term and your community may die a disappointing death.

Ultimately—maintain realistic expectations when it comes to the speed at which your new community grows. Remember, member numbers don't count—active member numbers do.

At the end of the day, you want to run a community that's strong and successful in the long-term rather than a flash-in-the-pan site that disappears as quickly as it launched. There is no such thing as overnight success when it comes to community management.

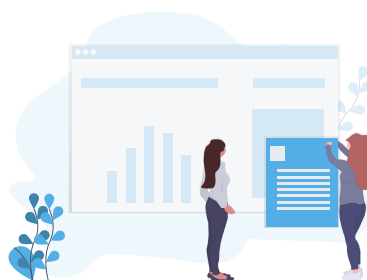
Here's our step-by-step guide to a smooth, stress-free community launch. Can you check off all the items on this list?

Content

Categorization is final	Categories and subforums should have clear structure and naming conventions—with no overlaps. Do users know where to find information?
Every subforum has at least 3 topics (or articles) which are relevant for users	Users must be able to discover something of interest during their initial visit. Nobody wants to go to an empty restaurant!
Post-launch content calendar is complete	Your content calendar is at its most vital during the first days after go-live, so you can keep the community active when there are very few users. Are you ready and confident?
Welcome topic is prepared	Introduce yourself and the community, so members recognize you from the get-go and know what to expect from the community.
Terms & conditions	No rules, no fun. Legally, you need to be prepared.

Traffic

Static integrations are active on most relevant / prominent locations on websites	Your static integrations are a key traffic driver. Make sure they're in place pre-launch to avoid slowing down member activation (registrations, topics, replies, etc).
Static integrations are active for secondary positions (e.g. end of FAQ, outgoing marketing / customer support emails)	Another traffic driver - use targeted messaging for existing users who have support questions or new customer queries and direct them to specific topics or categories within the community.
Community launch campaign	Depending on the launch approach you take (VIP invite only or open registration), you may choose to run a marketing campaign to promote the community launch across your existing digital assets, social media and corporate website. Link new members to the welcome topic to activate them as efficiently as possible. You may also choose to run a promotion or competition for new members who register and perform certain behaviors within the community such as posting topics or contributing to initial discussions.



Activation

User ranks are defined	Create a clear list of user ranks that active users will progress through based on their community activity and behavior.
User badges have been defined	Create a clear list of user badges so that users can earn rewards by being active and helpful in the community.
Notifications are optimized	Have you captured the right tone of voice and ensured your notifications include links to helpful topics, like your 'how to' articles?
Community team roles are defined	Community members are more active if they see a community team that's also active and responsive. Can users identify your community team members easily?
Activation content is ready	Content from your calendar with a goal to stimulate user activity (e.g. "this month's trending apps") should, by now, have been created or at the very least planned.

Welcoming & guiding your members: your to-do list

What's the best way to welcome new community members and bring them into the fold as quickly as possible? Guide them through their first few interactions!

Remember, new members usually register out of an individual need or desire to get a question answered or a problem solved—not necessarily to get involved in the community. That's the functional motivation. So how we activate these new users during their first sign-up activity and immediately afterwards goes a long way to contributing towards our overall community success.

To give new users the best onboarding experience we've compiled a list of recommended posts and 'how to' topics to point them in the right direction. Take a look at the list below and ensure you've covered all bases when it comes to making new members feel right at home!

Suggested welcome topics and posts to activate new members:

- ✓ Welcome! 5 tips to get you started in our community (include recommendations that users complete their profile, ask questions, use the search function, provide plenty of detail when posting new topics/questions and avoid spam)
- ✓ How to start a new topic
- ✓ How to edit your own post
- ✓ How to report inappropriate content
- ✓ How to attach images and videos to your post
- ✓ How to unsubscribe from topics and subforums



Grow your community at lightning speed

Your community needs to be successful on a small scale before it can work well with a larger audience. As long as your community concept is interesting and engaging enough for your initial founding members to truly get involved, you can rest assured that your community will grow successfully.

But it's important to make it as easy as possible for your customers and prospects to become community members - this should be a process that is clearly laid out for them.

Keep in mind that before a person can engage in the community, they need to learn about your community, they need to be convinced that they can gain something from visiting your community, and then they need to be persuaded that joining the community is a good idea.

While each of these steps will of course vary from person to person, you can rest assured that there are people who are eager to share knowledge or engage with your brand, but who simply don't know about your community! Make sure that you have a clear overview of all the people that could potentially become community members.

So with that in mind, what actions should you take to grow your community?

Acquiring community members entails three basic steps: reaching out, connecting and motivating.

Step 1: reaching out

How do you reach out to people?

In other words, how do you make people aware of your community and—most importantly—aware of what they can gain from visiting and becoming a member?

This first step entails getting the word out about your community and creating awareness. Creating awareness involves using different communication channels and different messages.

Why different channels?

Because not every potential member is active on the same channels. People tend to have a preference. Some people are more active on Facebook and follow your company's Facebook page, whilst some spend their free time scrolling through Instagram. Others are more likely to visit your company's support page instead—especially those who face technical issues. And let's not forget the potential members who will actually become aware of your community through their Google searches—which is why having content that search engines love is also a fundamental aspect of your long term acquisition strategy.

Why different messages?

One thing to realize about community traffic is that the source of the traffic matters. Traffic coming through social media tends to enjoy a lower bounce rate than traffic from organic searches, and traffic sent from website integrations such as embeddable widgets tends to result in visitors who spend a longer time on the site.

What this data tells us is that there is a relationship between channel usage and member motivation. People who are fans of your Facebook page are likely to be motivated in a different way from the people who receive your email newsletter, or from those who find your community through your website's support page.

Step 2: connecting (and the 3 basic motivations behind community visits)

Does this mean that we need to have a different message for each person that we want to visit our community? No, of course not - we're not trying to drive you to despair! Many people share similar motivations, so don't worry. Community growth doesn't require personalized messages; simply a few variations based on what we know are the three basic motivations for people to visit and join your community:

The most common motivation is **functional**. People are motivated by their need for information. This may be because they require support or because they are looking for reviews and customer opinions on your products and services.

Next up are those who have a motivation to participate. People want to participate because they consider themselves experts about your products. We call this motivation **self-efficacy**. For example, someone who can tell me everything I need to know about how to configure and optimize my iPhone would have high self efficacy about iPhones or perhaps mobile phones in general.

Finally, there is **belonging**. People can be motivated because they want to meet peers that share similar experiences or circumstances. This last motivation is often related to the emotional connection that people can experience with a brand. For instance, if you're a fan of Nike and their "Just do it" slogan—because you have a 'Just do it' attitude too—then the main reason for you to join an online Nike community will likely be the sense of belonging you feel to the brand and the connection you share with people who love the brand as much as you do.

So keeping these three fundamental motivations in mind, **the 'connecting' step of growing your community, then, is all about creating relevant, persuasive and timely communications. In a nutshell: create communications that are as relevant as possible for your specific audiences.** Don't give in to the temptation of trying to talk to everyone at the same time.

Let's imagine you want to use your CRM or email platform to send a newsletter that creates awareness about your community and the benefits of joining. If your audience is related to your customer base, then it should already be segmented—for example, by different customer personas. Let's imagine you have three customer personas. In this case, you should be creating three versions of your newsletter, with three distinct messages, rather than sending a generic version to the entirety of your mailing list.

Our own analysis tells us that, in most cases, relevance is more important than reach. Click through rates can be four or five times higher in communications that are aimed at specific customer segments or buyer personas. So if you're going to choose between reaching one million people with a generic message or 200,000 with a targeted message, you're much more likely to get better results with the targeted approach, even if your reach is substantially smaller.

You've got to be persuasive

Persuasive communications should follow these best practices:

- ✓ **They should focus on a single message.** This means that even if people can benefit in many ways from joining your community, every communication you create for a specific audience should focus on one message.
- ✓ **They should always have a clear call-to-action.** If you are creating a social media post about your community it should always provide clear guidance on what you want people to do. It may be to "visit your community", to "ask a question" or to "share something," but the bottom line is that communications containing clear CTAs will deliver higher conversion rates.
- ✓ **They should be appropriate for the delivery channel.** If you are creating an integration in your support page, for instance, the messaging you use in this specific integration needs to relate to where the visitor is at that moment—this matters.

Tick, tock: timely communications for the win

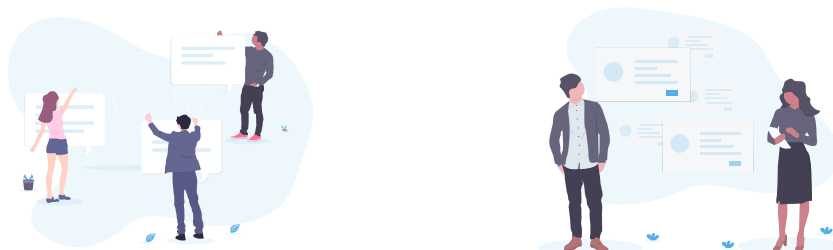
Being timely is key to connecting effectively, because a thorough understanding of context and an ability to respond with immediacy will positively affect the results of your communications.

People use each channel of communication with specific needs and expectations in mind. They also use some channels more than others, as we discussed above. Both of these elements comprise a context that you should be aware of.

Timely communications involve being aware of which content performs well through each channel, and adding a layer of context to it.

For example: If you know that the most visited part of your support page is the FAQ section, then a timely message would let FAQ visitors know that your community contains an even greater number of FAQs—making sure to highlight keywords and any user-generated content.

Creating relevant, persuasive and timely communications about the benefits of joining your community will help you to effectively connect with potential users. The more effectively your communications connect, the better your acquisition channels will perform.



Step 3: Motivating people to join and participate in your community

Motivating people to join and participate in your community is key to community success. What this really comes down to is consistently making clear to new and potential members the benefits of actively participating in your community.

Here's a list of potential reasons you can adapt and use to motivate people to join and participate in your community:

- ✓ Your community is the BEST source of relevant and complete information about your products and services
- ✓ Your community is the BEST source of trustworthy reviews about your products and services
- ✓ Your community provides teasers and news on new products before any other channel
- ✓ Your community provides the most up to date information about outages and service failures
- ✓ Your community is a place where experts can get rewards for sharing their knowledge
- ✓ Your community is the place where you gather feedback to improve your products and services
- ✓ Participating in your community gives exclusive access to private areas and content
- ✓ Your community is a place where peers who share a passion can meet
- ✓ Your community is a place where your customers can win exclusive tickets to events

Use this list as inspiration to build your own list of 'member benefits', and use these reasons across your different communications messages. Remember how we talked about relevance over reach? Having a clear purpose behind each communication will also allow you to take new users directly to a relevant topic or category—and increase your activation results.

Common mistakes to avoid

It's easy to make mistakes when it comes to community management. Over time, we learn which approaches facilitate successful community growth and maintenance, and which contribute to dead online wastelands.

Here are our top six common community management mistakes to avoid.



— Having a 'big bang' launch

We think we covered this pretty thoroughly above, but we can't stress it enough—don't invest all your marketing budget into a big launch campaign.



— Focusing entirely on the tech, not the members

This is a common one. While it's vital to get the tech right upfront, that's not going to guarantee you a long and successful community lifespan. Treat your members (especially that initial, founding group) as the precious brand ambassadors they are!



— Expecting your community to replace your marketing campaigns

Yes, communities executed well drive phenomenal SEO results. Yes, you get to communicate with your customer base across a multitude of digital channels, wherever they are. But whilst an online community is a highly effective tool in your digital marketing toolbox, it doesn't constitute the entire toolbox.



— Leaving your community to 'self-regulate' entirely

We recommend allowing early members to shape the concept and guidelines of your community, but as engagement and interactions increase, you can't expect your brand ambassadors to do all your community management for you, like a group of vigilantes! Check out our tips on staffing up your community management appropriately later in this guide.



— Expecting your community to replace your customer service 100%

Yes, implementing a customer community with a self-service focus can reduce customer service costs by up to 25%—but there will still be instances when a user's problem or question just cannot be solved by their peers—no matter how helpful members try to be!



— Misunderstanding your users' true motivations

As we already know, most users join initially with a need for themselves, not out of a desire to contribute to a community. As a community manager, your challenge is to turn this initial self-serving motivation into a group-serving mentality, using activation and engagement techniques. Don't worry, we've got more advice for you on those later in this guide!

Moderation tips & tricks

So, your team is in place and your community is up and running—very successfully, we hope! However, the work doesn't stop there. Maintaining a successful customer community comes with its fair share of tasks.

In this section we're going to address some of the big, frustrating jobs that fall onto a community manager or moderator's plate and give you some top tips to transform them into stress-free tasks.

Snip, snip: How to prune old content?

As your community becomes more mature, some of the content provided and answers given are of course likely to become outdated. Since you want your community to be a tool that helps people quickly and easily find the right information, you're going to need to take care of any out-of-date content. Get those pruning shears out!

PRO TIP: Don't delete old topics or move them to an archive. Why? By doing this, you'll delete pages that have had a lot of traffic over their lifetime and this can lead to a huge decrease in organic search visitors (more on SEO and traffic generation later in this guide) because Google will notice your community's decrease in informative pages.

Rather than deleting old content, update the content that's sitting within these outdated topics. Don't panic—we're not recommending you manually go through and check every single topic in the community to do this one-by-one!

With the following approach, your community content can be updated without the blood, sweat, or tears. Go through this process a couple of times a year and you'll be golden.

3 stress-free steps to updating your community content

Step 1: Create a list of the most visited topics over the past year

Check your community analytics (Google Analytics, Adobe, or your platform's native analytics) and export the 1000 most read pages or topics. To check if 1000 topics make sense for your community, take a look at the number of views your topics are getting. Decide on the number of pages your team will check based on this, and decide to only check pages that have been viewed over a certain amount of times. This may be as low as 25 views or as high as 100 views, depending on your own community and its lifecycle stage.

Step 2: Divide the topics among your moderators

Now that you've got an overview of your most viewed topics across the past year, it's time to divide the work across your team. You might assign 50 pages per moderator, for example. It might seem at first like a lot of pages, but remember that the majority of these pages will still be up-to-date and containing the correct information—for example: user profile pages, category pages and topics that don't contain any out-of-date information.

PRO TIP: In most cases, only 10% - 20% of topics will actually need to be adjusted with updated content.

Step 3: Update the topic content

Updating a topic can be done in one of two ways.

You can update the first comment of the topic by adding the right information.

Make sure to add the updated information in bold. In the updated comment, it's important to mention the date so that visitors can immediately see that the information is fresh, e.g.:

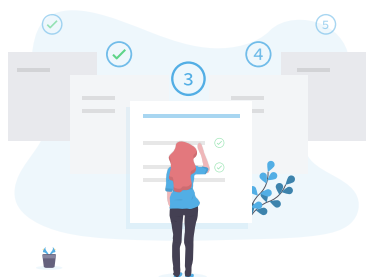
Edit 11 November 2018 by [company name]: The new rates for 2018 are ...

You could also decide to link to a newer topic that contains the right information, like this:

Edit 11 November 2018 by [company name]: The new rates for 2018 can be found in this topic: ...

This approach is likely to also gift you with extra 'Google juice' because it will lead to a higher SEO ranking of the updated topic from those extra clicks and visitors to the newer topic. It's a matrix!

The second approach to updating your community content is to edit the answer that was already marked as 'best answer' or 'solved' so that the updated information will also appear in the first comment.



Dealing with negative users & feedback

Every community needs a little bit of drama sometimes—we're human; this is only normal. However, dealing with very negative users can be extremely challenging for moderators. Ignoring them is—unfortunately—rarely the best course of action. We advocate addressing negative users and their feedback. Even though you're unlikely to be able to convince a particular user, your reaction will definitely improve the overall situation: other visitors will read your response and appreciate the fact that you are addressing the concern. This benefits your community reputation as well as your company's brand perception.

Managing conflict is never fun, but it is a task that community moderators will have to roll up their sleeves and jump into from time to time. Here is some advice for specific situations you may encounter, which will help you find better ways to handle negative users and feedback.

First things first: be there for your users

If a user is (repeatedly) very negative on your community, believe it or not, he or she will have their reasons. Nobody sits down and invests time and energy like that for no reason. So the first thing to do is ask yourself:

- ✓ What is this user trying to achieve with his negativity?
- ✓ Is there something I can do right now to ease his pain?

If you see yourself as a mediator between the company and the customer, you will have a more efficient approach towards dealing with user feedback. Not only can you help your colleagues improve products, processes and services, but you can even teach the user a few things about your company. Most users will genuinely appreciate getting a transparent, in-depth peek into how things are actually working.

You'll be able to counter a lot of negative feedback on your community by simply listening to your users and assuring them that you are aware of and paying attention to their feedback. Often enough, people just want their point of view recognized and heard.

General negativity by users

When a user shares a highly negative experience with your support / website

Try to find out what caused this experience. Was it a bug on your website, or a current limitation? Are you already working on a fix for this? Be as transparent as possible when explaining the reasons behind it. By putting the user experience in context, you will be able to show him how this could happen. Ideally, you will also be able to show that his experience is not the same experience that other users are having.

When a group of users is complaining about certain aspects of the product / missing features

Let's face it, if feature requests from users aren't outweighing the capacity of your product team, then something is very wrong! It's unrealistic to expect that 100% of requested improvements can be realized. But before you respond, ask yourself:

- ✓ Do I know why certain improvements cannot be realized in the near future?
- ✓ Am I able to communicate these reasons?
- ✓ Can I share other relevant features or updates that are planned, to ease the blow?

Often it can help to sit down with the colleague or team who is responsible for the feature in question and try to find a good way to communicate the company's plans. Your PR or Marketing department might also want to be involved in finding the right words for you. Don't be afraid to escalate these topics to them: You can make a difference for your users, and when they are really worried about something, then your colleagues also need to know about it.

Negative feedback on moderation action

Private messages about moderator actions

After you moderated a topic and notified the user about it, you might receive a private message in which the user will try to discuss the legitimacy of your moderation action, or will ask for proof of rule breaking.

It is perfectly fine to give this information to the user. Simply copy and paste the conflicting part of the comment into your reply (or describe what he said in case you have deleted it already), and add the exact part of your guidelines with which this comment was in conflict. Remember to also link to your terms & conditions page for reference. After that? Do not engage in further discussions.

Discussing moderator actions in public

Should a user try to discuss your moderator actions in public, delete the offending post right away to avoid undermining the credibility and authority of you and your community team. If you haven't already mentioned in your community guidelines or terms and conditions that discussing moderator actions is against the rules, then add it right away!

Pro tips for moderators

Long public posts, short private messages

A long reply will restore the trust of your user (and other users who read it), as they'll see that you invested significant time in sitting down and reflecting on the feedback. While answering private messages though, it's often a better choice to either redirect the user in question to the public community for further discussion, or to keep your reply as short as possible if you don't want to continue the discussion. If you send a lengthy reply to a PM, expect a lengthy one back!

Show empathy

We're not just talking about the mandatory "sorry to hear that" message here, but about showing some real, genuine empathy when customers are having a difficult time. You can do this by expressing that you relate to how they feel—for example, explaining that you also would be frustrated or disappointed in his or her shoes.

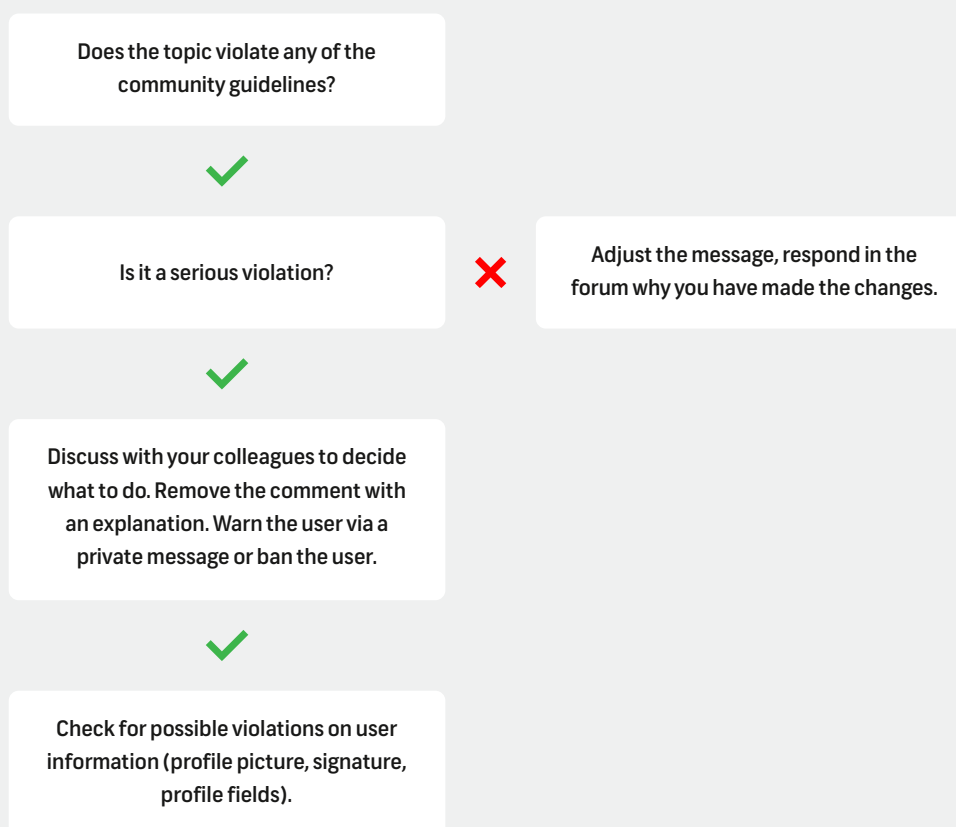
Promise improvement

As a community moderator, you are a public advocate of your company. If you surprise users and show that you actually do care (something that—let's face it—most regular users don't expect), then they will appreciate and remember this. This doesn't just stimulate the user to come back to the community in the future, but it also has a positive effect on his perception of your company in general.

Forward their feedback

Even if you think you're unlikely to be able to effect a change, let relevant teams know about any negativity around their subject. More often than you might expect, they'll come back to you with something that your users would like to hear.

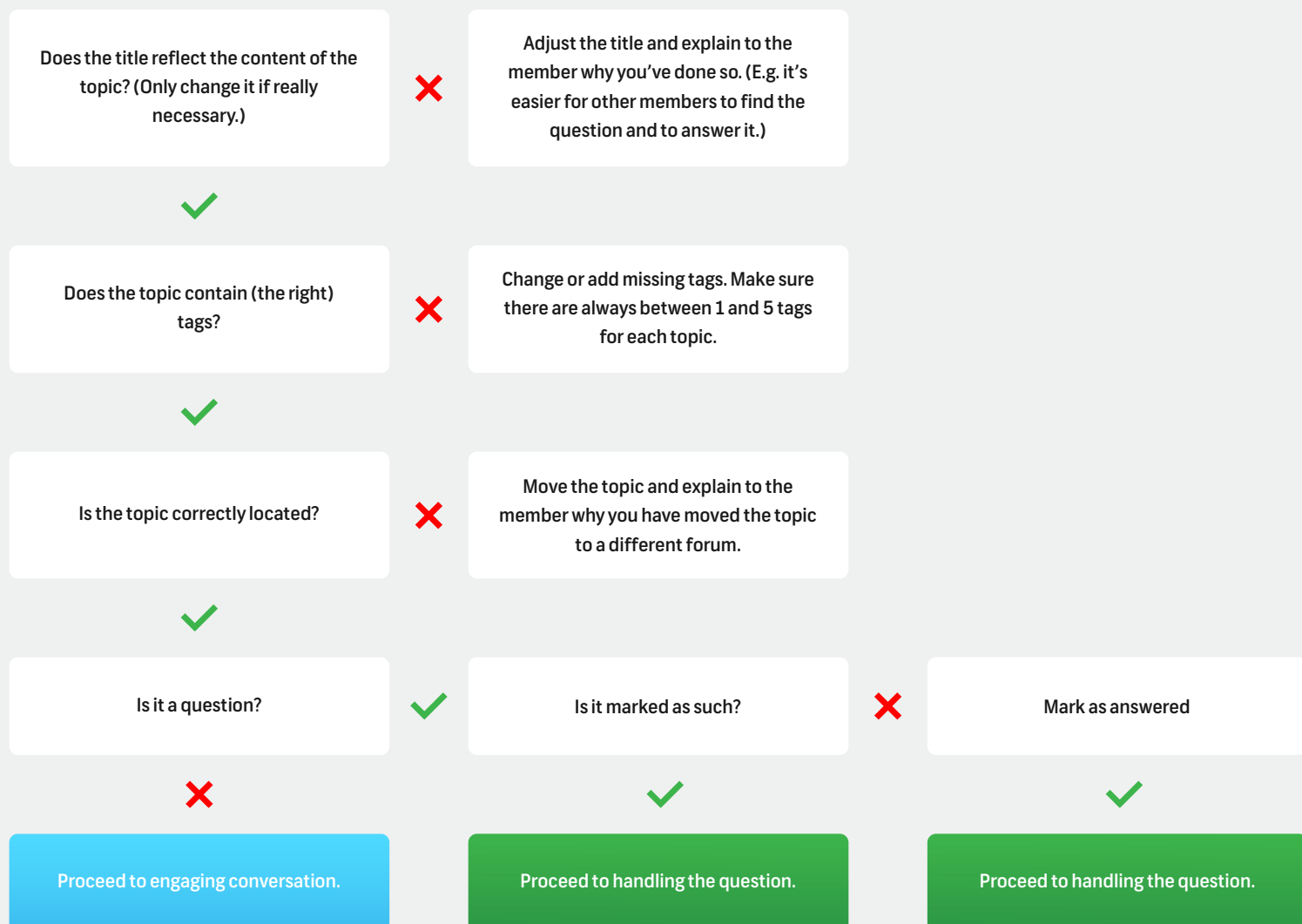
A moderation flowchart for assessing post violations



Managing community content: Your quick guide

By far the largest part of your daily to-do list as a community team member will be dedicated to reviewing, managing and contributing to the variety of content that is being posted within the community each day. It's easy to jump straight in and reply to user questions so you can strike them off your backlog, but before you do that, take a moment to review each post for accuracy, categorization and tagging. We've compiled a helpful flowchart to help make this process quicker and save you time.

Example workflow for a community moderator



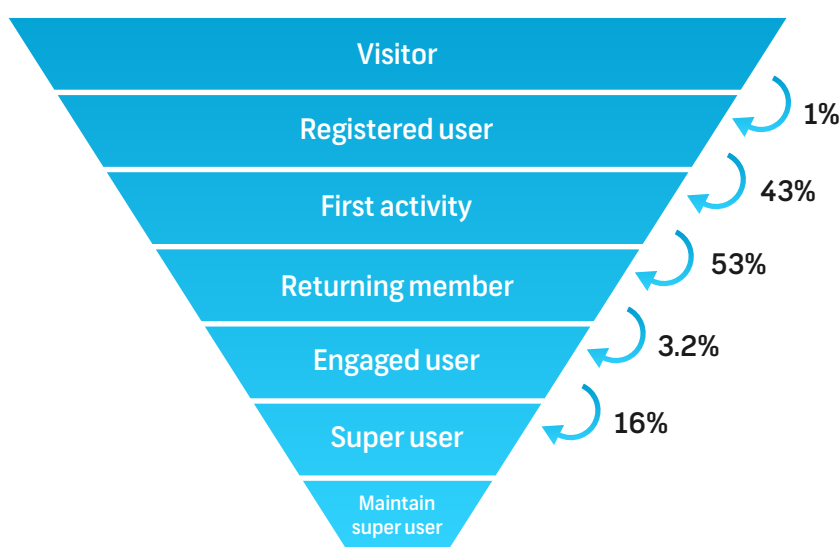
Gamification, activation & super users

As we mentioned earlier in this guide, successful communities should immediately begin producing results, and there are three elements contributing to those results: content, traffic, and activation.

We're going to take a deep-dive into the activation funnel and explain how you can use tactics like gamification and super user initiatives to fuel your community activity and increase member engagement.

The activation funnel

The activation funnel shows why traffic is very important in the initial phase after go-live. The example below includes some benchmark conversion rates.



Visitor

Simply put, a visitor is a person that visits your community web page, but doesn't (yet) register. Familiarize yourself with this horrifying statistic, and take activation seriously: only a mere 1% (on average) of people that visit a community web page will go on to become registered users.

Registered user

A registered user is a visitor of the community that has decided to register with the community by creating an account. We see that almost half (43%) of registered users go on to become active within the community.

First activity

When a user has posted or commented for the first time, this marks his or her first activity on the community. Over half (53%) of these users, on average, become returning members and will post again in the future.

Returning member

A user is classified as a returning member when he or she has posted in the community 5 times or more. Only 3.2% of these users become what we call engaged users.

Engaged user

A user is considered an engaged user when he or she has posted in the community 25 times or more. 16% of these users will evolve and become a superuser.

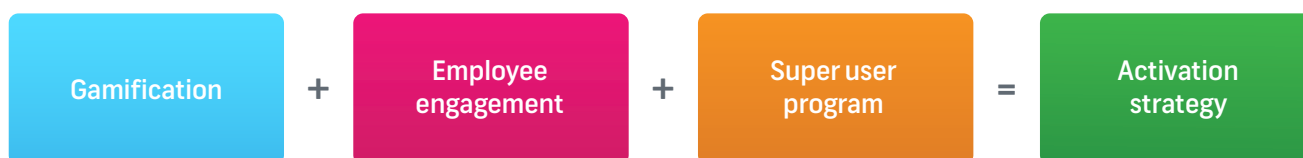
Super user

Super users are the most engaged users in your community. Someone is considered a superuser when he or she has posted more than 100 times in your community.

As you can see from the statistics, activation tactics are incredibly important to move as many people as possible through that activation funnel and create a healthy group of returning, engaged and super users. These members keep the community alive—without them, there wouldn't be much content for those people at the top of the activation funnel to come along and feast their beady eyes on!

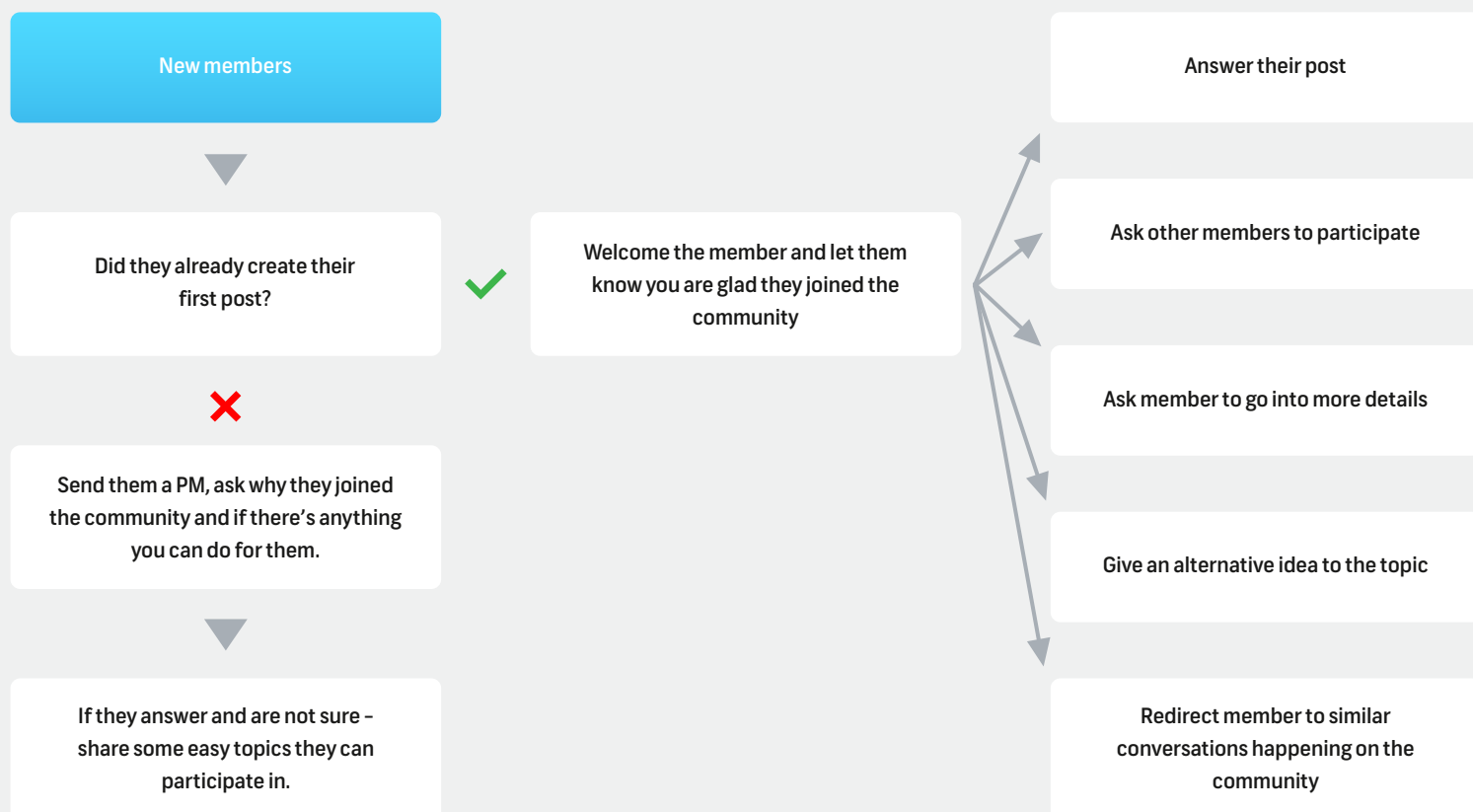
Community success drivers

Gamification, employee engagement and a super user program come together to form your community activation strategy



User activation workflow

If you're not sure how to go about this, here's a handy guide to activating new members of your community:



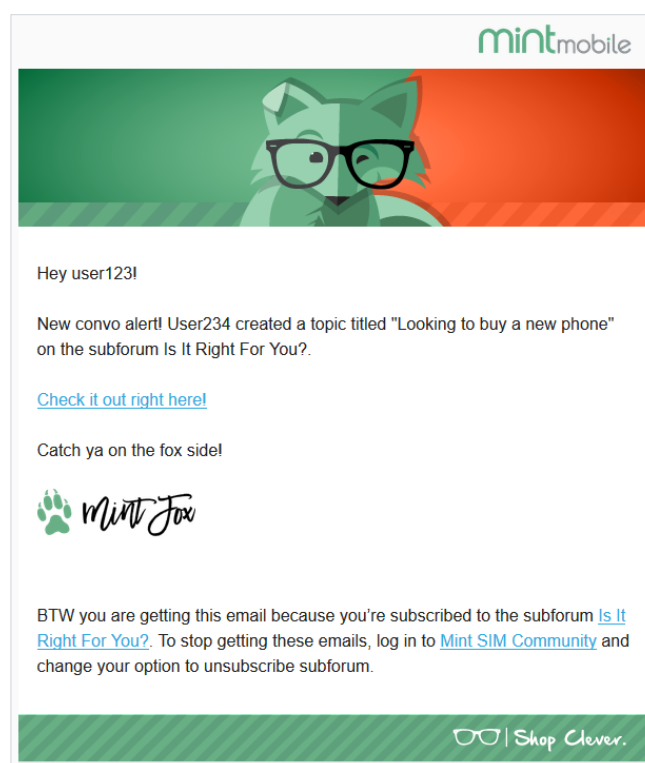
Activate users with awesome emails

Too many community managers fail to grasp the reasons that users initially join branded customer communities. Believe it or not, your average Joe is not registering out of a burning desire to give back to other people or volunteer their precious free time answering 'noob' product questions. They're signing up because they have a need of their own. Remember how we talked about the motivation of functionality? Never forget it!

One of the ways community managers can go about activating such users and transforming them into active, engaged community members is via a strategic notification email strategy.

Traditionally, the default text of community notification emails tends to be rather formal. In the interest of engagement (and keeping things light!) think about what tone of voice you'd like your community to have (whilst complying with any brand guidelines, of course) and adjust your notification emails accordingly.

Here's a great example from the Mint mobile community which showcases how you can stamp your own brand personality onto your notification emails to really skyrocket engagement:



You can see that adding an informal, funny line – “Catch ya on the fox side!” – has the ability to create a much more personal touch. Users will remember this and feel more welcome and inclined to become active themselves.

The activation email is a key moment in the journey of your users through the activation funnel. They clearly want to participate, but they're still at the very beginning, and this is where a good notification email can really make a difference:

- ✓ Give your users a warm welcome by choosing an informal tone of voice
- ✓ Advertise the benefits of engaging in your community (e.g. "learn more about your product")
- ✓ Link to the "how-to use the community" section
- ✓ Provide links to different categories, and maybe even directly to the "create a topic" page
- ✓ Some communities even have a dedicated “getting started” topic (see this great example from [iD Mobile](#)), and that's a great addition to your activation email, too!

Gamification: influence member behavior & achieve business goals

Gamification is a vital element of strong and dynamic customer communities. In order to create and maintain a thriving space, community managers must find ways to incite user engagement. Gamification triggers this engagement by creating moments of user gratification which hook community members to keep coming back for more.

As a community manager you're no stranger to gamification. But are you using all the tools your community platform offers you in order to create a super engaged user base and loyal members?

Community managers need to make the most of any features they can that play on their users' love for rewards, status and ranking, and social validation.

Quick refresh: what is gamification?

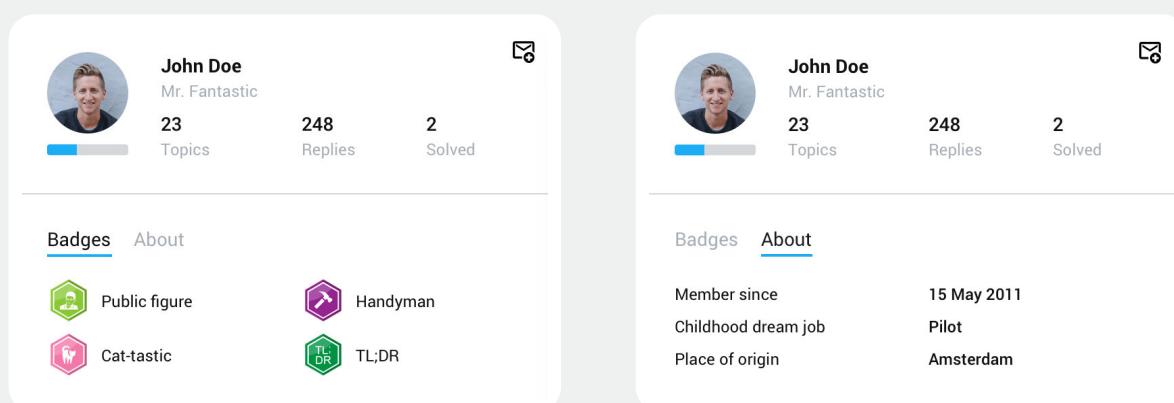
Gamification in a business context refers to the implementation of game mechanics in non-game activities. Not to be confused with actual games, gamification uses the existing infrastructure of a website and adds the engaging functions of games. In communities, gamification is used to motivate and engage the members by creating playful experiences.

The motivation for community members can be divided into two main categories; intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is driven by an interest or enjoyment in a task itself, without any external pressure or desire for reward. For example, a member that comes to the community for intrinsic motivations comes because he enjoys participating in a discussion about specific topics.

In contrast, extrinsic motivations are triggered by external factors, such as a prize or recognition from others. Community experiences trigger intrinsic motivations, which are then followed by extrinsic motivations, resulting in an increase in engagement from community members, as well as influencing their customer behaviors.

When people are participating in a community for both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons, they are much more likely to display high levels of engagement and participation.

Competitions, prizes and gamification systems are a great way to engage members that do not participate, based solely on intrinsic motivations. In other words, gamification enables members to participate not only because the task they are doing is interesting and fun, but also because they are rewarded for it and achieve a certain social status. In turn, it increases the member satisfaction of the community, and increases the likelihood of continued use and contribution.

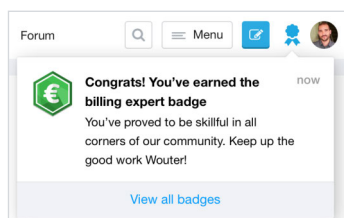
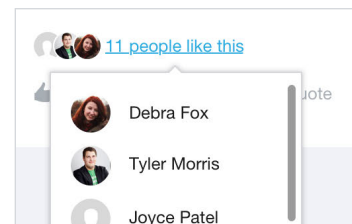


Here's an example of a community user who has moved through the ranks to earn badges in a specific domain of expertise. The badges on his user profile show John's area of expertise to other community members, creating confidence and trust.

Gamification tools for your community

Likes

Likes are one of the more social elements of a community and a great way for your members to show their appreciation for the contributions of others. Likes give users a feel good factor, especially when helping others or adding humor to a discussion.

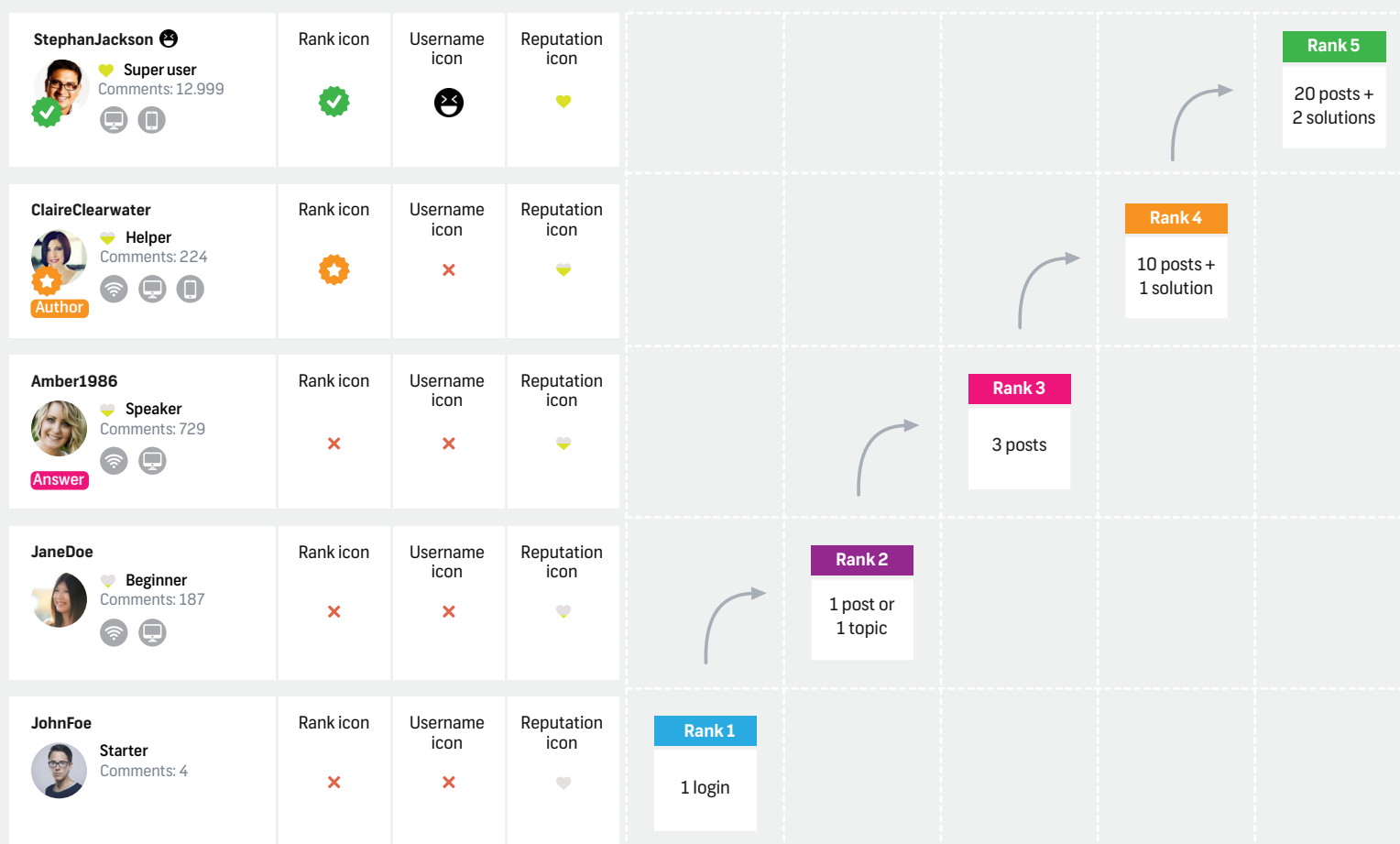


Badges

Badges are generally used to highlight the expertise of users, but they can also be used to reward new users' first activities in a fun and light-hearted way. Badges are a very visible element on user profiles and avatars and members love to receive new ones.

Ranks

Ranks can be used for longer term purposes as they allow you to identify your biggest brand advocates—who are instrumental for a thriving community. We advise giving members a rank on their first, second and then fifth login. When you do this, members are immediately aware of the rank system and can understand that it is based on their level of activity. The steps to climb up the ranks should then get bigger and bigger (and harder and harder!). For example, to get to one of the higher ranks a user should have answered a certain amount of questions. This way, the users with a higher rank have more intrinsic motivations to come back to the community, so more can be asked of them. User ranking is a key community activation tactic.



Alignment to business goals

By aligning your community gamification elements with your organizational goals, it is possible to use gamification to help achieve these business goals. Creating badges that are directly related to your business goals, for instance, can inspire certain desirable customer behaviour. For example, a service community that wants to reduce the amount of calls for a specific product should create an expert badge for that specific product. The badge will show which other members have expertise in this area, and this builds trust, as people have a higher tendency to trust other members that are using the same products or services as them.

Using the rank system to identify users to invite into ideation or co-creation forums is another great way to use gamification to achieve your business goals. In a nutshell, stimulating members to become more active through gamification results in more content being created and more answers being provided—due to the experience and knowledge of users. This in turn will help reduce the amount of time moderators spend answering questions, increase community traffic and ultimately increase the likelihood that your community becomes the primary source of information for your customers.

Tips & tricks for re-targeting inactive users

As we can see from the stats in the activation funnel, we lose a serious amount of members who were once active, but for some reason, fell off the radar. The majority of the time, this is because a user joins a community with a specific question in mind (remember that functional motivation), and once they have their answer or advice, they say adieu and leave the community for good.

What can we do to entice these one-time members back for another try? Let's take a look at retargeting inactive users.

You can choose to identify and then target specific groups of your user base and hit them up with new, interesting content. Some community managers choose to check on the activity of their very active members as well, to ensure that they keep coming back to the community. Well, they do say that prevention is better than cure ...

Your step-by-step guide to reactivating community members

- ✓ Extract user data and identify the dates and times of last activity
- ✓ Filter the list to see who has not been active within the past month (or select a time range you're interested in)
- ✓ Import into your email platform
- ✓ Send your reactivation campaign email(s)

What should you communicate to users with your reactivation campaign?

Well, that's going to depend on which group you are targeting. Are you targeting lapsed super users? Then make it very personal and present them with complex, hard questions. They like a challenge and were probably bored by those regular, everyday questions floating around in your community.

Are you targeting regular users who never have been very active? Present topics which have generated a large amount of views / likes / comments since their last visit. Also include topics where you are asking the users for feedback—get them involved! The chances are high that there might be something for them to discover as well.

You could also choose to send specific content depending on which category they were previously active in. For example, you could export the data and create segmented reactivation lists based on categories people have posted in.

Introducing a super user initiative: step-by-step guide

The strongest communities have a secret ingredient: their super users. Super users are a great source of value for your community. They are quick to respond to questions, great advocates for your brand and they keep your community going. If you haven't already implemented a super user initiative within your brand community, now's the time to act!

What is a super user?

Key elements that make up an online community super user



Here are our pro tips for spotting, recognizing, engaging and retaining the very best super users within your community.

What makes a potential super user? Here's what to look for:

- ✓ Members who contribute regular, impactful activity to the community (look at the statistics for likes and answers—check your analytics)
- ✓ Members who offer constructive criticism (it's OK to disagree if there's an alternative solution presented)

PRO TIP: When reviewing potential super users, differentiate helpfulness and kindness from advocacy and brand evangelists

Once you've spotted a potential super user, acknowledge them:

- ✓ Pick a specific post, and start your praise from there
- ✓ Make them feel important—appreciate their knowledge (@mentions are great for this)
- ✓ Ask for their advice—manage expectations

PRO TIP: To determine whether a member could be a good superuser 'fit' for your brand, do the following:

- ✓ Check their contact history—how do they approach your service personnel?
- ✓ Stalk their social media profiles—are they 😊 or 😞?
- ✓ Ask yourself: would you look forward to hanging out with this person for an hour?
- ✓ Ultimately, trust your gut feeling and intuition

Some ideas for making your super users official:

- ✓ Public / formal announcements within the community
- ✓ Offer access to an exclusive, closed area
- ✓ Use a non disclosure agreement to lower your sponsors' stress levels

PRO TIP: How to keep your super users active and engaged:

- ✓ Value their insights and ideas—but remember to manage expectations
- ✓ Make friends—get to know them as people, not just super users
- ✓ When someone is MIA, reach out, respect their time and assist where you can

Having a super user program provides a number of benefits for the rest of your community member base. If it's a formal, openly communicated program, it gives engaged users something to aspire towards—acting as a strong incentive for them to up their activity and step from one activation funnel level to the next.

Your super user program also benefits those new and less active members. They'll benefit from 'guaranteed' assistance outside of your company's regular office hours—often 24/7 when you have a globally distributed member base. This of course contributes to a higher satisfaction level with the community in general and increases the likelihood of new members moving through the activation funnel to become active and engaged users.

Suggested super user program activities

- ✓ Celebrate each super user's milestone, e.g. 1000 posts, 100 likes, 100 answers
- ✓ Celebrate calendar occasions, like birthdays or community membership anniversaries
- ✓ Schedule regular video chats, with or without an agenda, to strengthen the relationship and gain valuable feedback and insights on your community
- ✓ Schedule occasional on-site or face-to-face meetings to help super users feel part of a team and more connected with your brand

While your super users of course have one key thing in common—your brand—always remember that they are different people with different personalities, and they will often have varied views on the topics discussed within your community. An approach that works very well for one may not work at all for someone else, so bear this in mind when building your super user program and remember to incorporate that one key element: flexibility.

Final **PRO TIPS** for your super user program:

- ✓ Always be honest, transparent, and genuine with your super users. They are switched on individuals!
- ✓ Never demand activity or tasks from super users—always offer options and suggestions
- ✓ Remember that your community's "top" users are not always by default "super" users

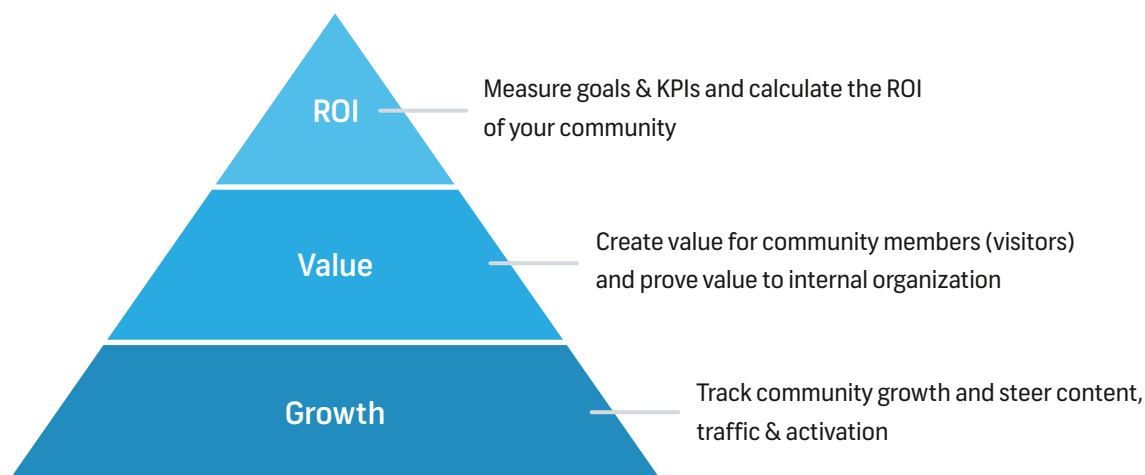
Analytics & reporting

Your community is in place to help your organization achieve its business goals, right? Right! That means you're going to have to measure and report back on how it's doing in relation to those goals.

Don't panic! Community analytics isn't something to be afraid of. Reporting can really help to draw useful insights for your team and boost community growth. Not knowing who your most active users are, or being unaware of the results of campaigns and other community activities is a sure-fire way to waste your team's resources and miss out on great opportunities to improve the overall health of your community. Not to mention that you'll be unable to rave about your blinding success to the stakeholder team if you're not measuring it.

The three different types of community analytics

We recommend distinguishing between three different types of community analytics:



Let's take a look at these three types of community analytics in a little more detail:

1. Community growth

It may sound pretty self-explanatory, but first of all, your community needs to grow healthily. This means that you should have plenty of visitors, content and activity.

2. Community value

You may think it goes without saying that the content within your community should be valuable to both your customers and your organization, but it's surprising how much 'junk' can build up over time.

3. Community ROI

In the end, you need to be aware of both your community growth and your community value in order to determine what kind of ROI you are getting.

As a community manager you must decide which analytical insights are important for stakeholders within your organization.

Using your community concept to determine your KPIs

It's critical to define the business case for your community before launching an implementation plan or even selecting the platform you'll use. Not only will this secure buy-in and support from your executive board or leadership team, but defining the community's strategic function will guide your planning and rollout agenda—making sure you maximize the return on your investment from the first day your new community goes live.

Your community concept—namely, what your community accomplishes for your users—will influence the KPIs you choose to track and measure. You have likely opted to make support the its primary function, but you may also be using your community for product ideation and co-creation with your customers.

PRO TIP: Communities that are intended to serve many purposes—sales, service, and product ideation all in one—all too often fail. Too many stakeholders with conflicting objectives spell disaster for a community. Start small, achieve success, and only then expand your community objectives.

Remember to focus on the concept of impact and not solely on ROI

We recommend when compiling your community report(s) to make use of a combination of your community platform's native analytics as well as any external analytics tools you have access to. Google Analytics is a key port-of-call that shouldn't be overlooked (bonus: it's free and easy to use), but some community teams also utilize analytics tools such as Adobe Analytics (formerly Omniture) and social listening tooling like Coosto or Brandwatch.



Regardless of your exact analytics stack, let's take a look at which metrics are best to help you illustrate your community's growth, value and ROI.

Community growth metrics

Traffic metrics

- ✓ Number of unique visitors per timeframe
- ✓ Number of page views per timeframe
- ✓ % new vs returning visitors

Activity metrics

- ✓ Registrations per timeframe
- ✓ Conversion percentages of members moving through the activation funnel stages
- ✓ Posts created per timeframe / category
- ✓ Topics created per timeframe / category
- ✓ Topics created per type (e.g. question, discussion) per timeframe / category
- ✓ Private messages sent per timeframe
- ✓ Private messages sent / received per moderator per timeframe
- ✓ Number of moderator actions performed per timeframe
- ✓ Logins per timeframe
- ✓ Average posts per user per timeframe

Community value metrics

- ✓ Number of created topics / posts per timeframe
- ✓ Number of posts marked as 'best answer'
- ✓ Number of answered questions
- ✓ Growth in engaged members and superusers
- ✓ Average time spent on the community

- ✓ Landing page and behavior flow
- ✓ Search queries performed within the community
- ✓ Peer-to-peer activity (number of posts answered by non-employees vs employees)
- ✓ Liveliness: average posts per day, category or topic
- ✓ Number of community highlighted problems
- ✓ Number of community highlighted opportunities
- ✓ Customer satisfaction results for community members vs non-members
- ✓ Percentage improvement in brand awareness
- ✓ Increase in brand loyalty
- ✓ Percentage improvement in social mentions
- ✓ Customer referrals via community
- ✓ NPS scores
- ✓ Efficiency of super users (questions/answers)

Community ROI metrics

- ✓ Number customer service calls deflected
- ✓ Reduction in customer service call handling times
- ✓ Reduction in customer service headcount
- ✓ Reduction in new customer onboarding/implementation costs
- ✓ Increased customer retention rates
- ✓ Increase in employee productivity
- ✓ Increased new customer conversion rates
- ✓ Reduction in advertising budget / SEO costs
- ✓ Community exit survey results

PRO TIP: Maximize your ability to prove community value and impact by enabling non-registered users to perform basic social interactions such as liking posts. Our research suggests that of the 90 - 95% of community visitors who never register, 38% nevertheless find community content helpful. Make sure you can track this enormous boost in proof-of-value by giving those swathes of non-registered visitors the opportunity to give your content a thumbs up.

Using a content dashboard to demonstrate value

Hopefully by now you have plenty of inspiration when it comes to ways to prove the value of your community, so let's get into the nitty-gritty of how to work easily with your data and create a comprehensive content dashboard. The exact displays available to you within the back-end of your community platform will vary according to your vendor, but all providers should be able to give you quick and easy exports of the data shown below.

Furthermore, data from exit surveys (not shown in the screenshot) is great for measuring call deflections, resolution levels and customer satisfaction. And don't forget to use Net Promoter Scores (NPS) to identify how much your community is contributing to increased brand loyalty, preference and positive reviews.

Visualize your community health with analytics dashboards

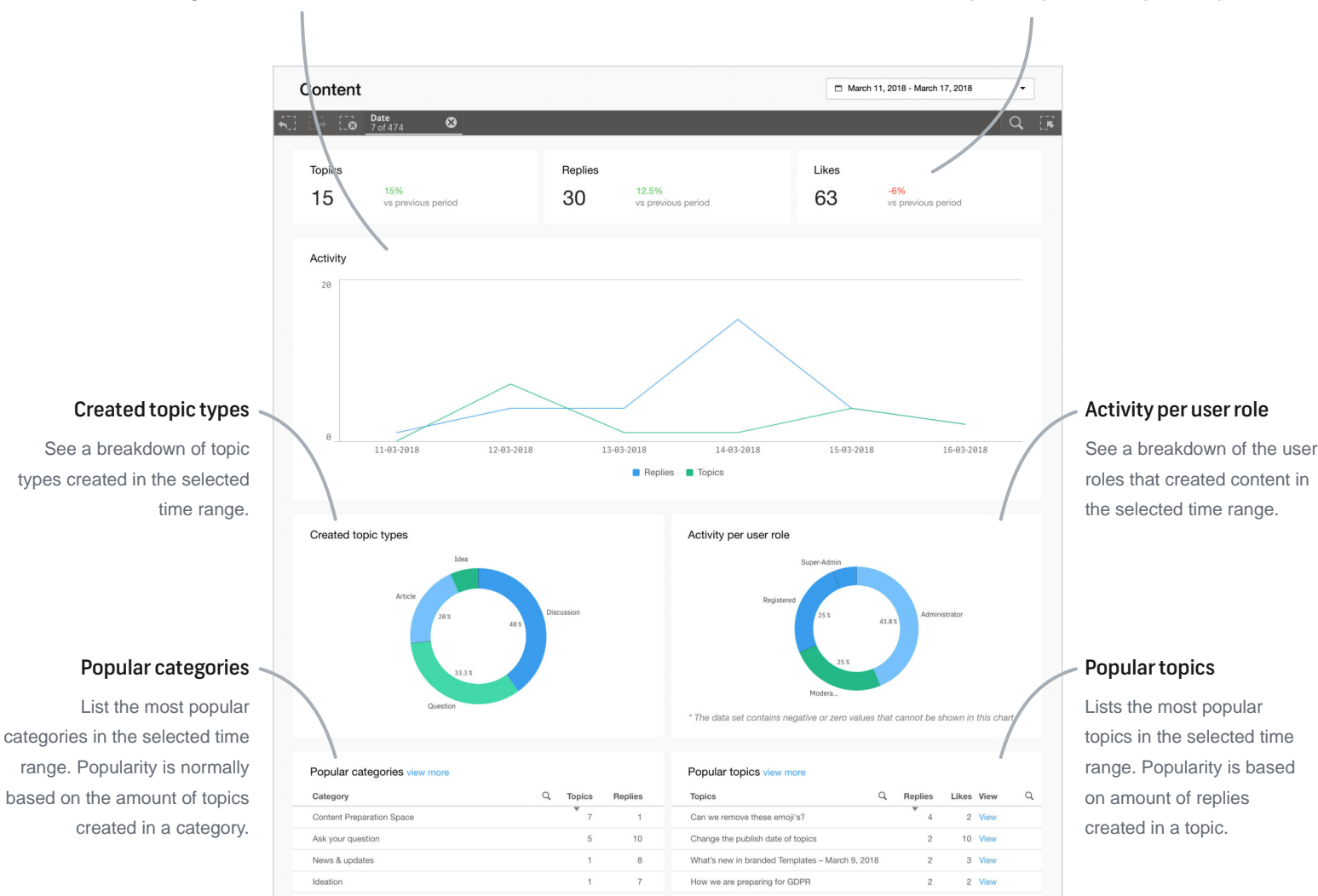
Native analytics dashboards make community value easy to prove

Activity chart

New topics and new replies, ideally plotted on a timeline. You should be able to hover over the line or date label and get more detailed information.

Topics / Replies / Likes

The amount of topics started, replies and likes given on any post in the selected time range. The percentage value will show an increase or decrease in started topics compared to the previous period.



Driving traffic & SEO-proofing your community

How online communities impact your organization's SEO

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a complex beast and it's simply not possible to cover absolutely everything here—but what we are going to do is discuss the importance of SEO-proofing your community content and give you some best practices to follow so that your community can become a huge traffic-driver for your company!

There are a few key reasons community content generates such superb SEO results:

1. Communities generate more relevant content

One of the key things Google takes into consideration when ranking content for SEO is user relevance—their algorithm essentially attempts to 'think like a user'. Who better to create content relevant to users than the users themselves?! Helpful, relevant content written by users, for users—Google loves it!

2. Communities generate regular, fresh content

Next to relevance, Google's algorithm absolutely loves fresh, new content. Recent content with social characteristics (such as from a community) prompts it to crawl your pages and get you ranking higher, faster. Let your community members do some of your marketing heavy-lifting just by navigating and interacting within the community pages!

3. Communities help identify and generate new keywords

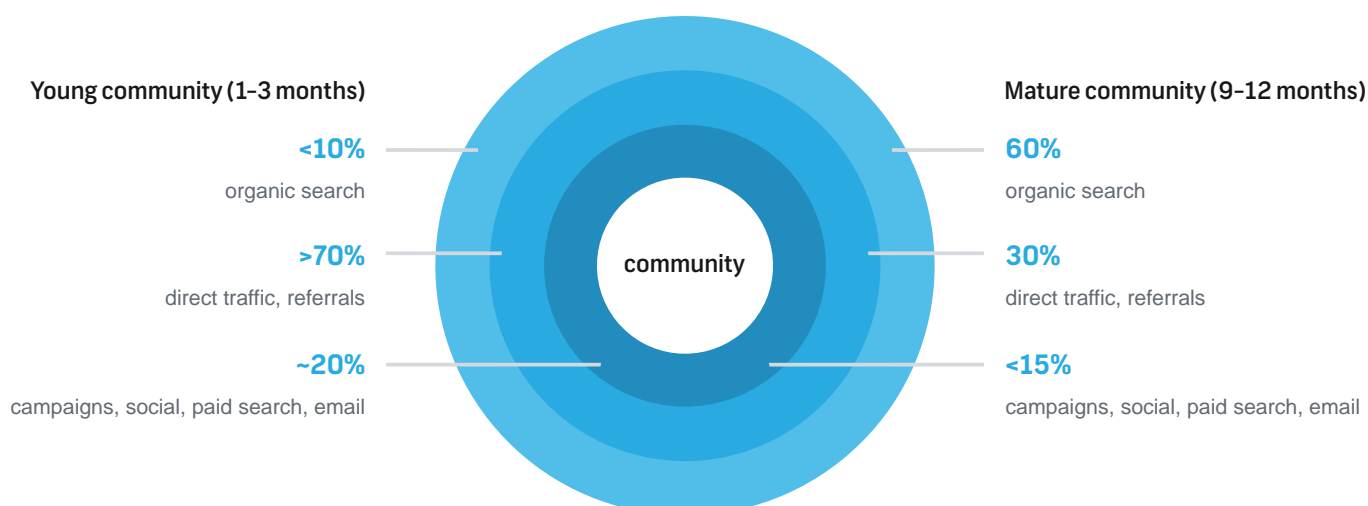
Because your community members are talking about topics that are important, relevant and interesting to them, new pages are being created with different keyword variations (hopefully!) every single day. This increases the opportunity for new, organic search traffic to find what they are looking for on your community pages.

4. Communities generate cross-links

You may be aware that one very important factor of Google's SEO ranking algorithm is your site's linking structure. Back-links, cross-links, deep-links—you name it, Google loves 'em all! And guess what contributes to an enormous number of links across your online properties? Your online community, of course.

Traffic drivers towards your community

Traffic distribution for young vs. mature communities



SEO for long tail keywords

Long tail keywords are search queries that are related to your primary keywords—from a thematic point of view—but which individually only have small search volumes. If your organization's vertical entails a large portfolio of products, perhaps spanning both B2B and B2C markets, with a lot of specifications and a complex nature, then the amount of different search queries is potentially enormous! In these cases, optimizing content for long tail keywords is often the best option.

Let's take an example. Suppose you are the owner of a second hand car retailer in New York and you've just created a website for your company. You want to optimize your website and ensure you rank highly. You might first look at good keywords to optimize for based on search volumes and competition. You'll probably come up with something like this:

- ✓ *car sales* (with 5 million queries and 90% competition)
- ✓ *cheap cars* (with 100K queries and 90% competition)
- ✓ *car dealerships* (with 500K queries and 85% competition)

As you can see, whilst the search volumes on those keywords are huge, so, unfortunately, is the competition. You have virtually zero chance to start ranking for those search terms. The answer here is to use long tail keywords:

- ✓ *second hand Toyota dealer in NY* (with 2.5K searches and 5% competition)
- ✓ *cheap Toyotas, GMs and Ford in New York City* (with 1.8K searches and 1% competition)
- ✓ *best deals on 2012 Toyota Landrover* (with 3K searches and 10% competition)
- ✓ *best deals on 2014 Toyota Camry* (with 2.5K searches and 2% competition)
- ✓ *second hand Camry, Focus, Civic Prius in New York State area* (with 2K searches and 3% competition)

You'll find many more of these long tail keywords which—while their individual search volumes are small—will add up to a significant amount of traffic. It's easier for you to dominate searches around these keywords because of their low competition, rather than any of your previous keyword choices, no matter how high their volume, given their very high competition. The next step is to use all these long tail keywords within the copy of your website. The amount of copy your website can handle will likely limit your ability to properly optimize for so many keywords. The more content you can optimize, the better, because the key when it comes to long tail optimization lies in having large content volumes that drive engagement. Your online community is an unmatched channel when it comes to helping you win a spot at the top of the SERPS for many long tail keywords.



How to optimize your community content and rank better with Google

What can you as a community manager or moderator do to capitalize on the SEO benefits your community can bring you? Ranking higher or lower in the SERPs (Search Engine Results Page) depends on the relevance that search engines attach to your content, and this relevance is best known as Page Authority. Page Authority does not only refer to content on the page itself, but also to user-friendly attributes your page has. Pages with link farms, duplicated content, hidden content or excessive repetition of keywords would be considered low authority—these old-school techniques no longer serve webmasters looking for an SEO boost.

Two key elements will contribute to a greater Page Authority for your community: content quality optimization and incoming link optimization.

Content quality optimization

Choosing the right keywords and placing them in the right places in your content is a start-point and essential to increase your community's SEO value. What else can you do to optimize your community content, outside of the words you put down on the page?

Headlines, sub-headlines, public tags and styling

All of these elements hold strong SEO value according to Google and other search engines. They should be used wisely and optimally throughout posts. But how on earth can your community team manage these elements when you have such a wealth of content to trawl through?! Here's how your community team can manage this:

- ✓ Identify the 10 most popular topics or themes in your community on a monthly basis (make sure to filter according to country and language)
- ✓ Use a keyword planner to check the current search volumes of keyword groups related to these topics/themes
- ✓ Based on the keyword planner results, focus on no more than 5 of these keyword groups
- ✓ Make sure all moderators and content creators know these keyword groups

With this information in place, the community is now ready to optimize its content for the next month. Here's what to do:

- ✓ Make sure that all topics (user generated or internal) contain public tags that always include at least 1 of these keywords (preferably more)
- ✓ Make sure that all content created by the company uses at least one keyword (and preferably two or three)
- ✓ Make sure that 20% (one out of five) topics created by users contain at least one of these keywords
- ✓ Make sure that the body of your company's created topics contains at least one of these selected keywords in either bold or italic formatting
- ✓ Make sure that the body text of your topics or replies contains these keywords too, either in H2 and H3 format

With these best practices in mind you may be wondering then whether all user-generated content is sub-optimal or has no SEO power. Luckily, that's not the case. Not all content needs to be optimized through keywords and most importantly, content should always be easy for humans to read and understand—that's why we write for people, and not for search engines. When it comes to user-generated content, optimizing 20% of your community headings will definitely have an impact on your SEO ranking, without becoming too intrusive for your users. If the one in five rule raises complaints from your member base, then adjust, and limit optimizations to one in ten. You'll still see the benefit while retaining the integrity of your community.

Applying tags and marking answers as being 'right'

Community topics can be given a number of public tags to specify the general subject(s) covered in the post. The use of tags also creates different traffic pathways towards a topic.

In a similar way to tags, marking 'right' questions as such can help search engine bots to understand the themes or subject of a web page and help them to contextualize different forms of content.

When a question (topic) receives a 'right' answer, this answered topic will have the benefit of including all relevant information (both question text and answer) at the top of the page. This enables bots to understand the relation between different replies and between question and answer. This significantly increases the chance of search engine queries being matched to the community's content when a related question is asked through a search engine.

Curating your content to improve SEO

As your community grows, content volumes increase on a daily basis. A consequence of an increasing number of topics is that high quality topics can quickly become buried and forgotten. To counteract this, curate your most popular content. You could, for example, create a series of "Frequently Asked Question" topics, which are set as sticky topics for each forum. Not only will this help your users find answers faster, but it will also help bots locate quality topics within your community and improve your ranking.

Incoming link optimization (or link building)

SEO strength is, to a certain extent, transferable: meaning that the content authority of another page can influence the authority of yours. If you're linking to your community via blogs, social media channels, or wiki pages, or any third party channels, then the SEO power of these pages will be passed to your community. The more links you gain and the better ranked the pages where you place these links are, the greater your own SEO authority becomes. The practice of implementing a strategy that directs links towards your site in order to increase its SEO power is called link building.

PRO TIP: most sharing happens across social media so focus efforts here (for example, share your popular topics and send people from social media to the community)

PRO TIPS to improve the SEO value of your community:

- ✓ Check the content rankings within your own community
- ✓ Use social media post titles that have proven to resonate with your audience better in the past
- ✓ Use similar keyword ideas across content channels and make sure they are all integrated (blogs, forums, website)
- ✓ Use exit surveys to ask people what they want to know more about

Driving traffic with integrations

We've talked about SEO-proofing your content, and hopefully you're now feeling confident about how to get your content really working for you by bringing more and more members to your community.

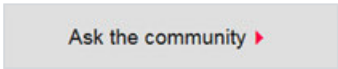
But there are other cool tactics to drive maximum traffic to your community and activate as many new members as possible. By integrating your community content across your existing digital assets such as your corporate website, static FAQ pages or product app, you get to target customers right at the heart of their user journey and bring them over to your community to enhance their experience.

Integrations are crucial for the success of your community. The more you can integrate your community content across the different digital touchpoints of your customer's journey, the more traffic you can send to the community and—ultimately—the more value the community will bring to your organization.

Depending upon your community platform, you'll have the option to implement three different types of integration: static, dynamic, and interactive.

Static integrations

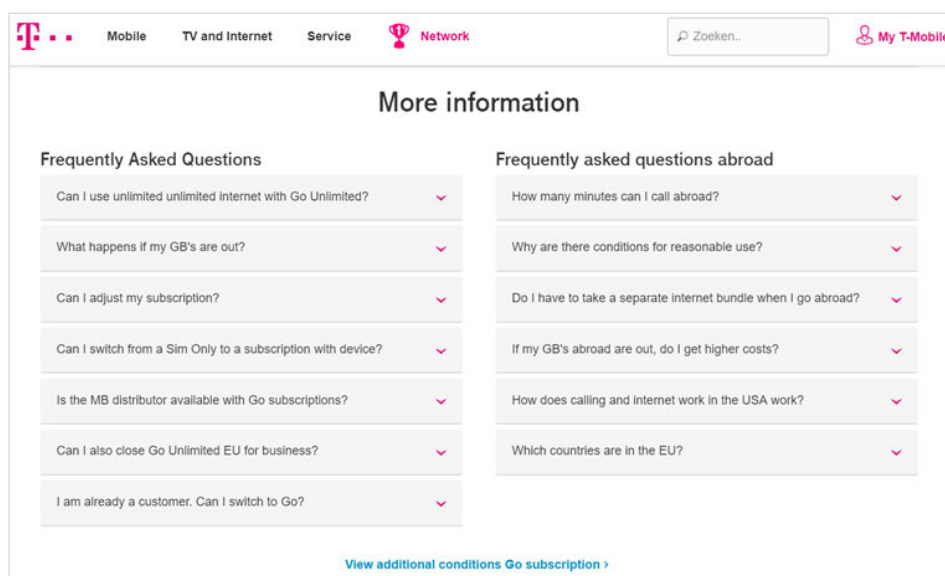
Static integrations are the easiest to enable as they're reliant only on basic HTML edits. Some examples of static integrations might include: buttons, navigation links, banners and explanation blocks. No real-time data or interactive functionality is used with static integrations. That said, they can create a lot of value and are instrumental in driving traffic to your community. By incorporating a forum button in the header navigation or by adding an icon that represents the community next to other contact channels, your visitors are much more likely to navigate to the community.



An example of a static integration

Dynamic integrations

Dynamic integrations are relatively more complex to develop in comparison to static integrations. However, they offer a huge pay-off by allowing you to integrate community content onto your website pages. Think, for example, of a pop-out embeddable widget making product-specific help topics or how-to tutorials available on individual product pages.

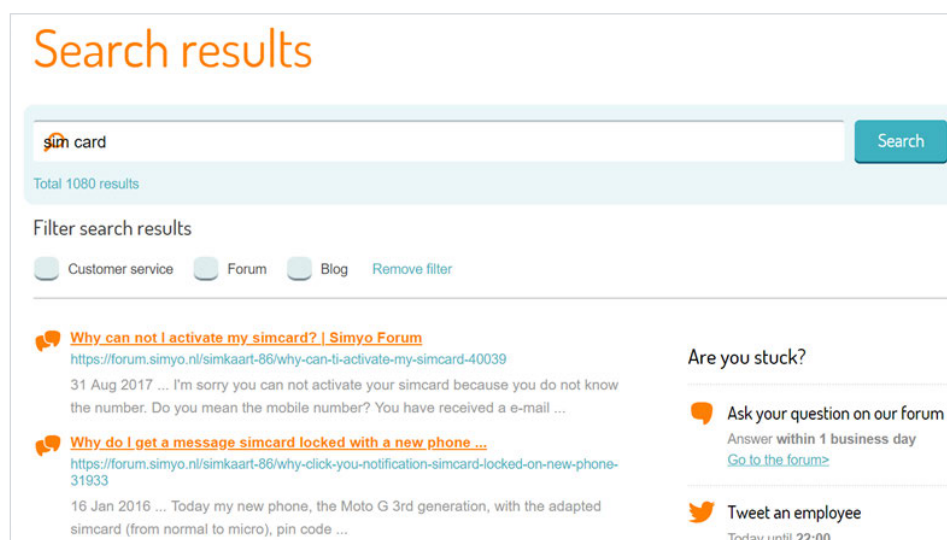


An example of a dynamic integration

Interactive integrations

Interactive integrations go one step further by allowing community content to be shown based on user activity—for example by offering community topics and posts within search results, or by allowing users to actually interact with community content outside of the community itself, thanks to API-integrations.

You'll need a community platform with an accessible API in order to implement dynamic and interactive integrations, as they require contextual and real-time data to be pulled from within the community itself.



An example of an interactive integration

Above all, you should look at integrations as powerful tools to generate a constant flow of traffic towards your community. We've compiled a list of some powerful integrations you can implement for your own community to maximize its potential. Some of these are relatively basic while others are particularly potent.

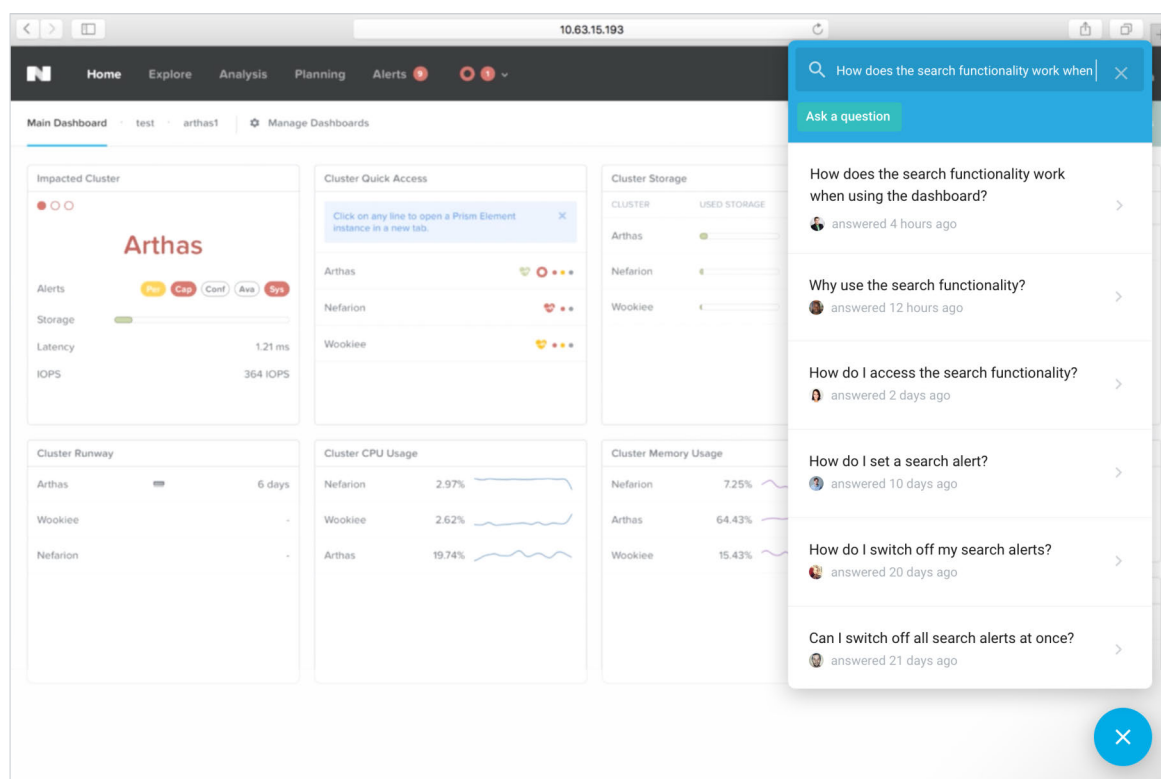
Where	How	Type	Why it works
Integration with your email newsletter	Custom HTML within your email template	Static	A banner or small piece of text within your customer emails introduces your community as a new channel for customers to ask questions, give feedback & learn
Integration with your corporate website homepage	Update the header or footer of your website	Static	A link pointing towards the community sends website visitors with questions to the right destination
Integration on your support channel contact page	Display the community as a separate—and significant—support channel	Static	Recommend that users consult the community with an icon, text & link, and present the advantages of using the community over your other support channels (e.g. quicker response times)
Integration on your support channel homepage	Update the header or footer of your support homepage	Static	A link pointing towards the community sends website visitors with questions to the right destination

Where	How	Type	Why it works
Integration via your support channel emails	Custom HTML within your email template, or link within your email signatures	Static	Recommend that users consult the community with an icon, text & link, and present the advantages of using the community over your other support channels (e.g. quicker response times)
Integrate with Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems	Refer callers to customer support to check the community for answers first	Static	Recommend that callers access the community for a wide range of answers and 24/7 availability
Integrate community links on product pages	Add customized and specific links to the community on product pages (e.g. "How to get started with your new iPhone")	Static	Give site traffic a call-to-action to join the community and learn more from peer experts
Integrate community on FAQ pages	Add dynamic links to community content at the end of each FAQ	Dynamic	Link at the end of a FAQ - "Still looking for an answer? Visit our community" gives visitors a clear next step for service queries. Dynamically serve links to relevant FAQ-related topics
Integrate community content in support search results	Display relevant community content alongside company-curated content in search results on the support page	Interactive	Give users searching the support pages a rich range of answers and content that solves their challenge
Integrate community content in homepage search	Display relevant community content alongside company-curated content in search results on the homepage	Interactive	Give users searching the site a wide range of content and compel them to join the community
Integrate your community in your support documentation and user manuals	Add static links to relevant community articles or tutorials within user materials and online manuals	Static	Help users get more out of their product or service by linking to helpful community content
Integrate community content in your registration emails	Include links to getting started tutorials or posts within the community when you send a welcome email to new users	Static	Refer newly registered customers to the community for their onboarding questions and help manage post-purchase dissonance
Integrate community content onto your support contact page	Display helpful community content on the support channel contact page	Dynamic	Show popular topics and recent discussions on the support channel page to send traffic to the community and reduce calls to your support channel
Integrate community content on your product pages	Display dynamic content-specific community content on product pages based on context	Dynamic	Enhance your customer experience and drive traffic to the community by showcasing popular context-specific community content on your product pages
Integrate your community on printed materials and invoices	Incorporate a link and call-to-action to help articles or tutorials on printed customer materials like invoices	Static	Reduce burden on customer contact channels by referring customers to your community to get their questions answered

Measuring integration success

With some integrations more complex than others to implement and maintain, it's important to measure integration success so that you can focus your efforts on the areas that are the strongest traffic-drivers for your community. Traffic analysis tools such as Google Analytics or Adobe Analytics work well for gathering data and analysing user behavior across the full customer journey—so they give you a good overview of how your static integrations are performing for you.

PRO TIP: ensure your inbound community links have the correct UTM tags. Without these, your analytics tool will be unable to give you an overview of where your community traffic is coming from.



An example of a dynamic community integration within a B2B technology product dashboard. An embeddable community content widget here provides contextual community content which is relevant to what the user is doing with the product at that moment.

Cover all bases: inspiration for your Ts & Cs

Don't risk landing yourself or your brand in hot water. Here are some general elements that we always recommend you include in your community guidelines:

General guidelines / code of conduct

You want your users to understand clearly which behaviour is allowed on the community, and which is not. Things to include are:

- ✓ No abusive behavior towards other users (e.g. insults / threats / racism / harassment)
- ✓ No off-topic discussion / intentional derailing of discussions
- ✓ No multiple registrations
- ✓ No commercial advertisement
- ✓ No sharing of illegal content
- ✓ No spam / soliciting
- ✓ No public discussion of community staff action / communication

Liability for shared information

Make sure that users understand that information taken from your community does not necessarily have to be correct, and that they have to use this information carefully. No damages resulting from information taken from your community can be held against your company.

Removing content / banning users

Your community team has the right to remove content from the community, should they feel that this is necessary. The same goes for restricting access to the community (banning users). Include the email address of your community team here, so that users can email you if they disagree with an action from the community team. You can mention here that you will only take these actions to protect the positive experience of other users on the community.

Links to third party websites

This is simply a hygiene factor nowadays. Make it clear that you are not responsible for any material on other websites that your team or other users on your community are linking to.

Cookie policy

Users want to be aware of how their data is being used. Your community platform provider should provide you with a standard cookie policy you can adapt and use.

Community availability

Some communities decide to include this item to explain that they cannot guarantee availability, but it can also be used to forbid people attempting to break or 'hack' the community and its functionality, or simply to inform them that you cannot be held responsible for any costs incurred from using the platform (e.g. from their internet provider).

Looking for more community legalese inspiration? Check out these examples of brands doing it right:

[Sonos T&C](#)

[Mint Mobile T&C](#)

[Deezer T&C](#)

What have we learned?

Community management is an enormous topic. We hope that with this guide we have managed to give you a selection of best practices, tools and step-by-step guides you can use at every stage of the community lifecycle to support you on your quest to growing your own thriving branded community.

Some clear takeaways to put into action:

- ✓ Get clear on your community concept, goals, and objectives so you know where you're headed from the get-go
- ✓ Structure a world-class community management team that's trained and eager
- ✓ Create your content strategy and work a solid publication plan
- ✓ Start small and grow fast by reaching out, connecting and motivating members
- ✓ Supercharge your SEO by optimizing and pruning old content
- ✓ Maintain your brand's reputation by managing negative users effectively
- ✓ Use gamification to activate your members and achieve business goals
- ✓ Measure your community content performance—regularly!— and pay attention to growth, value and ROI
- ✓ Drive sizable traffic using proven SEO techniques and integrations
- ✓ CYA with the legal stuff

We have a whole heap of other resources dedicated to helping community managers just like you build and manage effective, impactful brand communities that have a significant impact on business performance. [Check them out here](#) or [subscribe to our newsletter](#) to stay up to date with the latest and greatest in customer-driven communities.

About inSided

The Ultimate Guide to Community Management is brought to you by inSided, a provider of leading edge community solutions that help your customers find better answers to their questions.

inSided is an advanced community platform provider that helps brands leverage the power of the crowd to provide relevant answers, give quality service and improve customer satisfaction. With 100+ successful communities implemented, inSided customers typically see a 15-25% reduction of support costs, a 10-15% increase in NPS scores and customer advocacy, and an 8% reduction in churn.

Some of our happy customers

