DIGITAL RADISH

12 STEPS TO BUILDING YOUR ONLINE COMMUNITY



DIGITAL RADISH

Online communities are a great way to boost customer loyalty and brand awareness.

According to Jive, "sites with communities are **nine times more likely to be revisited by users**, and community participants purchase five times as much and twice as often as non-participants."[1]

But setting up a community takes time and planning. Take a look at our steps to help you get your online community up and running through set-up, interaction and growth.



[1]Jive Best Practices

DIGITAL RADISH

CONTENTS

SET UP


Define your value and purpose


Choose your community's platform


Research and recruit influencers


Programme of content


Management

INTERATION


Engage


Offer support


Encourage user generated content


Keep trolls at bay

GROWTH


Competitions


Reach out offline


Keep the conversation going

DIGITAL RADISH

1. DEFINE YOUR VALUE AND PURPOSE

Having an online community is a sure way to grow your brand, but you need to define what value you are offering people in your community. There has to be a need or an interest.

Why this step is important:

If your community is uninteresting or overly pushes the company's own product and doesn't offer anything to users, members will not engage and the community will struggle.

Value

One of the primary reasons for joining online communities is to be in a network with a like-minded group of people, brought together by a common interest and to feel connected with these people. As host of the community, you need to work out what these people would get out of being in your community. It may be one of the following:

Problem solving - users will work together to solve problems, or seek solutions from brand representatives/employees, e.g. Cisco - technical support

Topical discussions - a group of people with a similar interest to discuss, often with an informal tone, e.g. Mumsnet – parenting community

Reading interesting content - a community that shares the latest news and research on a specific topic e.g. Team Titleist – golf community

Learn new skills – a group that will inclusively help members to learn new skills, e.g. Unity – gaming community

Purpose

You need to work out what value you will get out of your online community. Socious suggests that the primary reasons are:

"Increase sales and marketing - Differentiate your company from competitors and create additional value to doing business with your company.

Improve customer service - Increase customer loyalty through increased interaction and engagement between customers, employees, and partners.

Empower product management - Partner with customers, prospects, and noncustomers to generate, validate, and develop ideas for more profitable products and services. "[2]

[2]Socious – Online Customer Communities

DIGITAL RADISH

2. CHOOSE YOUR COMMUNITY'S PLATFORM

Depending on the value and purpose you defined in step one, you will need to choose how you will host your community.

Communities used to solely function on platforms specifically built for community use, and many still do.

But with so many social media networks available today, which now function more as knowledge and communication networks, it's rare to use a single platform as they have varied functionality and purpose. Facebook (65%) and Twitter (60%) are the most popular channels, but around a quarter of companies are managing more than one account on each.[3]

65%

60%

Why this step is important:

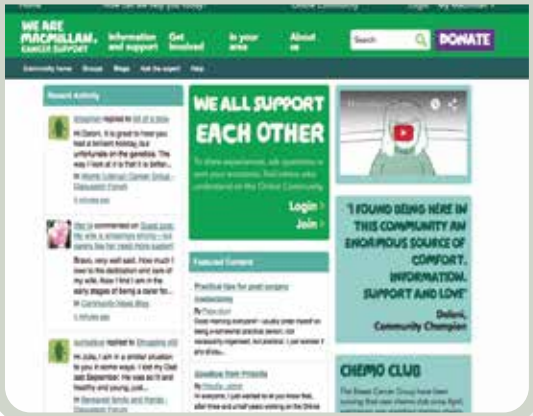
How your community communicates is the basis for your network. If people find it hard to navigate or connect with others, they will not stick with you.

Eg

Macmillan Cancer Support

Dedicated online community website with groups, blogs and ask the expert forums. It also has a Facebook page and Twitter, Flickr and YouTube accounts for members to share their experiences and support each other.

> https://community.macmillan.org.uk



[3]Episerver whitepaper - Tackling the social challenge

DIGITAL RADISH

3. RESEARCH AND RECRUIT INFLUENCERS

Find out who influences people in your community. Oracle suggests that getting an early buy-in from internal influencers can help kick-start your community: "Recruit a business sponsor who can manoeuvre within the organisation, maintain key relationships and secure resources."[4]

Tools such as **Traackr** and **Social Bro** are a great place to start with this. Search for hot topics within your community and it will show you where these are already being discussed on social media, and who is leading the discussion.

Influencers are likely to produce the majority of content (other than the host of the community) and will tend to be the most active. Traackr advises giving support to your influences, which will give them more opportunities to produce relevant content and share with the community.[5]

Why this step is important:

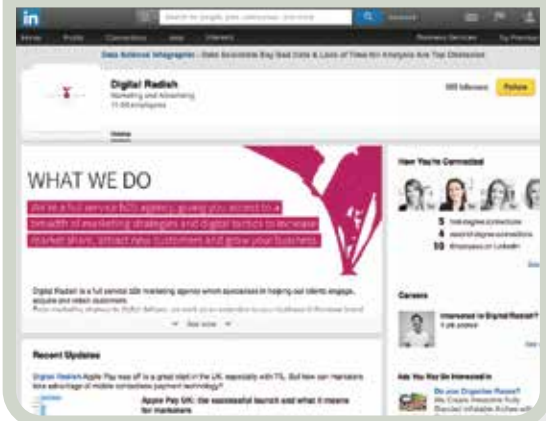
Influencers will direct the tone and content of the community and represent the community's value.

Eg

Linkedin

has a vast array of influencers who attract new members to the site and share their own content to spark discussions within various networks. Influencers include Richard Branson, Bill Gates and Arianna Huffington.

> https://www.linkedin.com



[4]Oracle – Building Online Communities [5]Traackr – Influencer Marketing for Community Building

DIGITAL RADISH

4. PROGRAMME OF CONTENT

Access to thought leadership content is the number one reason for professionals engaging in networks and communities,[6] according to The Society for New Communications Research.

This means it is important to plan the content you want to create and distribute. This content should be customised, and certainly written with your community in mind. Thought leading content is what will keep people coming back to your community and communicating with other members.

Organise your content in an editorial calendar. Lead Forensics has a handy Content Planner Guide, in fact they call it the Ultimate Content Planner, www.leadforensics.com which you can use to plan your content strategy and roll out. This will help to keep your content distribution consistent and regular.

Content also needs to be organised on the site so members can find topics that interest them. Navigation and an effective search method are almost just as important as the content itself.

Why this step is important:

Fresh content will not only keep your members interested, but also attract new members because having new and interesting content, will improve you SEO standing.

Eg

RetailWeek

has a community of retailers that is supported by a strong editorial programme, with thought leading content keeping its network of over 110,000 users commenting and contributing to discussions.

>http://www.retail-week.com



[6]Leader Networks – SNCR research

DIGITAL RADISH

5. MANAGEMENT

Communities need leadership to monitor member engagement. There should be at least one person managing your online community, and they may be backed up by several people from within your organisation to manage different aspects of the network depending on how large and active your community is.

According to Episerver, 28% of social media activities are run by a marketing executive, 14% by a PR executive and 16% by the IT manager.[7]

Socious recommends that in order to plan a solid management programme, "Identify the community managers who are responsible for the success of your online community. Then, develop scenarios with different member and staff personas to ensure you are solving your target audiences' problems in the way they want them solved."[8]

Why this step is important:

Oracle highlights, "management involves tracking, technical support, member engagement and community program and event planning."[9] You need make sure your community has someone to direct all these aspects, or it will fall apart.

Eg

Mumsnet

has a dedicated team of community managers to ensure that their 1.5million members are happy and engaged. They deal with members[7] email queries, answer questions on their forums, manage the social media and maintain public and customer relations.

> http://www.mumsnet.com



[7]Episerver whitepaper - Tackling the social challenge [8]Socious – Online Customer Community Strategy [9]Oracle – Building Online Communities

DIGITAL RADISH

6. ENGAGE

Constant engagement is vital to maintaining a community. 95% of Millennials worldwide want brands to court them.[10] You can do this by interacting with them, and then they will return the favour by endorsing you.

Market research firm, Chadwick Martin Bailey, found that 60% of Facebook fans and 79% of Twitter followers are more likely to recommend those brands since becoming a fan or follower.[11]

Reaching out to your community to spark interesting discussions can help to increase engagement and loyalty. Interacting with community members will turn them into advocates. Customers like to have a voice and online communities are the perfect place for them to engage with you. [12]

Why this step is important:

The whole essence of a community is that it is a place for sharing and discussion. This momentum needs to be maintained, or the community will be null and void.

Eg

Unity Technologies

keep their gaming community active by engaging with members and talking about the latest features their gaming development platform offers and help inspire the community to be creative and innovative with their game dev projects.

> https://unity3d.com/community



[10]Jive infographic [11]Socious – Online Customer Community Strategy [12]Forrester – Design Your B2B Community for Maximum Engagement

DIGITAL RADISH

7. OFFER SUPPORT

Communities are a great way to offer customer support, whether it is from your company or via peer-to-peer support by finding answers to their questions in discussions with other community members.

It's worth engaging with those who have a problem though, as 86% of consumers quit doing business with a company because of a bad customer experience[13] according to Harris Interactive.

Communities are essentially a great way to crowd source information by being able to understand customer's needs.

86%

Why this step is important:

Helping to solve problems for your community will put you in good stead. For many, it is a key reason for joining a community.

Eg

Sage

offers support through its CRM community forum. People who are having issues with their Sage CRM software can have discussions with experts and access the knowledgebase to gain answers to their questions.

> http://community.sagecrm.com



[13]Harris Interactive, 2010 Customer Experience Impact Report

DIGITAL RADISH

8. ENCOURAGE USER-GENERATED CONTENT

User-generated content plays a role in 84% of millennial purchases and 70% of boomers purchases[14], so it's important to get users interacting, creating and sharing their own content.

84% of worldwide customers take action based on reviews and recommendations of trusted resources[15] - these could be the influencers in your community.



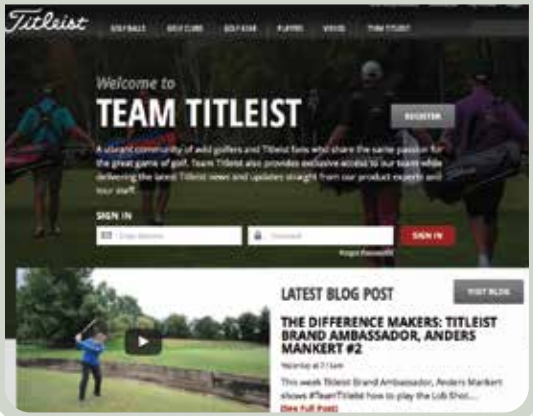
Why this step is important:

To prove your company's worth, the endorsement needs to come from external sources, not just from you.

Eg Team Titleist

is the online community for avid golfers and Titleist fans to share their golfing tips and advice. Members are active in the form of blog posts and sharing knowledge on the forum as well as sharing photos and videos of their golf in action.

> http://www.titleist.co.uk/teamtitleist/



[14, 15] Jive infographic

DIGITAL RADISH

9. KEEP TROLLS AT BAY

Due to the anonymity that comes with sitting behind a computer, it's inevitable that you will get some trolls in your community who are looking to insult you or your members and stir up trouble.

Pew Research found that 40% of internet users have personally experienced online harassment with 66% of those being trolled on social media.[16]

You need to be prepared to prevent/manage the damage before a hostile environment is created that will put members off your community.

Why this step is important:

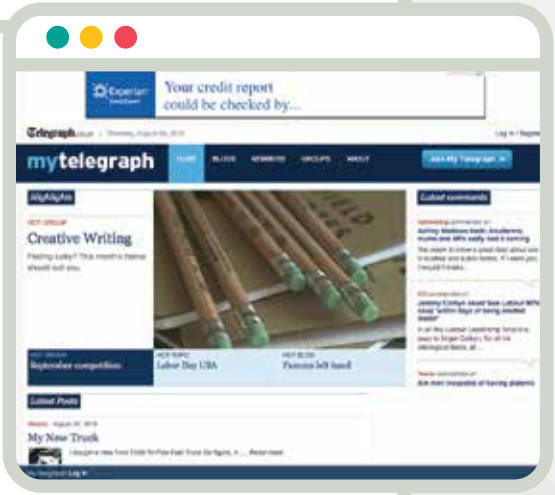
If your community feels threatened then users are unlikely to stay. There is likely to be disagreements, but you need a draw a line between retaliation and abuse.

Eg

My Telegraph

the online community for The Telegraph users, has an active management team who attempt to quell any members who deliberately stir up arguments or are purposely offensive. As Shane Richmond, Head of Technology for Telegraph media group puts it, they "act as "emergency services", cleaning up the worst messes and tackling the most severe offenders."[17]

> http://my.telegraph.co.uk



[16]Pew Research – Facts About Online Harassment [17]The Telegraph – Why online communities attract trolls

DIGITAL RADISH

10. COMPETITIONS

Running competitions and offering prizes as incentives are a good way to engage people within your community and attract new members.

Competitions can be purely to win prizes, but they are also an excellent opportunity to crowd source some information. You can ask members to answer a couple of short questions to gain insight in return for a chance to win a prize.

Why this step is important:

To get your community to grow, offering incentives is an effective way to attract people and it offers a bonus to current members.

Eg

The Student Room

runs lots of competitions in association with sponsors. Prizes are relevant to the user group, e.g. payment of university fees, iTunes vouchers, Amazon vouchers. Competitions often help their work by crowdsourcing members for ideas and information, for example, submitting an idea for a student app.

> http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk



DIGITAL RADISH

11. REACH OUT OFFLINE

Offer a human touch to your community by sending members a piece of direct mail or organising a party.

When members register, you can request their address details and then you are able to send something directly to their house. 56% of consumers say mail grabs their attention,[18] so it's a great way to engage with your member through a different medium.

Parties are a great way to meet your community and (once you've warmed them up with some online conversation and emails) warm up your prospects. By nature, people are more likely to do business with people they know and trust, so that face-to-face element can help secure your relationship.

56%

Why this step is important:

To get your community to grow, offering incentives is an effective way to attract people and it offers a bonus to current members.[19]

Eg

The Guardian

has a membership service that allows you to join in discussions within an online community and attend Guardian Live events. These range from Q&A sessions with writers, athletes, actors and politicians, to supper club events for foodies to eat and network at.
> https://membership.theguardian.com/events



[18, 19]Royal Mail – Mail and Email study 2014

DIGITAL RADISH

12. KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Running a community requires time and dedication – it's up to you to keep the conversation going and stick to your plan that you laid out in steps 1 to 9.

Why this step is important:

You put in all the hard work of setting up your community, now it needs to be maintained. Good luck!

You need to make sure you follow the covering points:

- Stick to your brand and purpose
- Keep your programme of content up-to-date
- Make sure your community is being managed properly
- Keep engaged
- Offer support
- Encourage users to contribute
- Don't let the trolls bite
- Offer competitions and incentives
- Reach out offline

Thanks for reading this whitepaper, we hope you found it helpful and get good use out of our steps to building your online community.

DIGITAL RADISH

www.digitalradish.co.uk +44 (0)20 3609 1349