

**ONLINE COMMUNITIES:
WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME ?**

**WHAT AN ONLINE
COMMUNITY CAN DO
FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION**



Introduction

The way prospects and customers make decisions has fundamentally changed in recent years. The biggest change has occurred in the way they share and consume information online. The change is so profound that Forrester Research claims that people make over 500 billion impressions on each other about products and services every year.

In a nutshell, your customers want to connect with other customers when it comes to making a purchase or resolving a customer service issue. This shift raises an interesting question: how do companies participate in these conversations in a way that adds value?

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

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



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What Your Organization Will Gain

Your online community isn't just a place to facilitate interactions between your customers and prospects. Your community is a platform that can deliver material business results.

Studies have shown that prospects and customers that are engaged with you will buy more from you, be more satisfied, and remain customers longer.



Here are just some of the benefits realized by customers who have deployed online communities:

1. Increased sales as a result of online community recommendations that increased buyer confidence.
2. Customer acquisition and retention by nurturing brand advocates and increasing word of mouth marketing.
3. New product innovation by capturing and curating insights from customers and partners.
4. Improved customer service by enabling trusted peers to provide help and answers.
5. Reduced support costs by enabling peer-provided support and assistance.

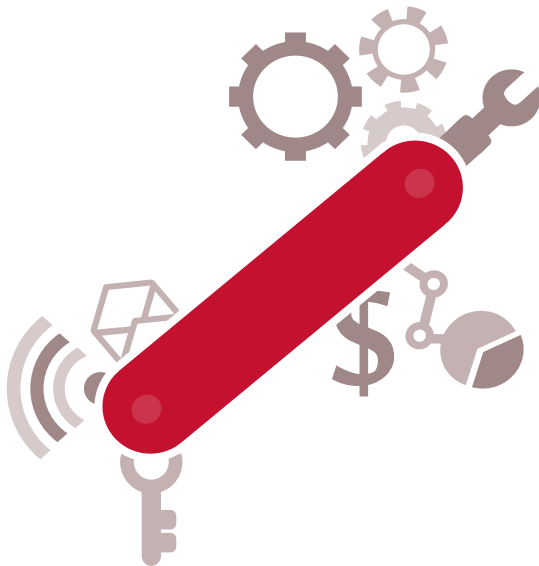


How Can You Use an Online Community?

Let Us Count the Ways!

With the right set of available features, an online community platform can provide you with as many capabilities as a swiss army knife provides to a camper or hiker.

We list 20 use cases here. You can mix and match these to address the needs of your organization.



1. **Lead generation** - Turn community members into qualified leads.
2. **Revenue growth** - Generate revenue by creating demand in the community.
3. **Inbound marketing** - Create content that attracts new visitors/members.
4. **Email marketing** - Build your email database with the community.
5. **Customer engagement** - Create a deeper sense of engagement.
6. **Event marketing** - Market upcoming events in the community.
7. **Sales enablement** - Let the sales organization learn from the community.
8. **References and testimonials** - Generate references from members.
9. **PR and announcements** - Make major announcements in the community.
10. **Social sharing** - Let members share content on Facebook and other social sites.
11. **Customer support** - Let members provide customer support to other members.
12. **Online events** - Host webinars in the community.
13. **Content creation** - Use the community to "crowdsource" content.
14. **Executive briefings** - Have executives brief members on key topics.
15. **Product ideation** - Collaborate with customers on new product ideas.
16. **Product feedback** - Gather product feedback from community members.
17. **Product testing** - Have members act as beta users of products.
18. **Peer networking** - Let customers, prospects, employees and partners connect.
19. **Brand affinity** - Create greater brand affinity via the community.
20. **Customer advocacy** - Identify customer advocates to support marketing.

Getting Started is Easier than You Think

The good news is that it's never been easy to build an online community. Why? First, most of your customers, employees, partners, and prospects now expect to engage with you socially (thank you Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn). Second, new technology such as SaaS is making it easier than ever to build and run an online community. Third, community management is now a mature field with well-established best practices. See Page 6 of this document for useful resources on community management.



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Making Your Community Successful: 5 Essential Best Practices

While every online community is different, our experience tells us that successful online communities depend on a set of five essential practices.

1) Understand why people will use the community

The most successful online communities provide something that your prospects and customers want. Ask a handful of your current customers why they would participate in your community. You'll uncover different reasons that may range from connecting with other like-minded people to resolving product issues. Use this data to inform community design and the activities you promote in the community.

2) Build a community that will scale over time

You should design your community so that it will scale over time. While you may start with a few dozen members, successful communities have hundreds of thousands of members. Make sure that you use a community technology platform

that scales and that your community management processes can scale to support a large membership.

3) Focus on recruiting and engaging community members

Members are the most important part of your community. The more time you spend recruiting and engaging members, the more successful your community will be. As such, the vast majority of the Community Manager's time should be spent on recruiting new members and engaging existing ones.

4) Standardize how you manage the community

Building and managing an online community is relatively straightforward. There are now established best practices that you should use to manage the community. Make sure you standardize around a core set of best practices and activities. For example, try to invite a certain number of people to join every week and use a standard email invitation to do it.

5) Measure and optimize your online community

Measuring your online community is critical to determining whether it's having an impact on your business. You should track strategic metrics that show how the community is supporting key business objectives such as revenue growth, as well as operational metrics such as the number of members in the community.



Take the First Step

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

Contact us today to arrange a consultation:

✉ **Email:** sales@dnnsoftware.com

☎ **Phone:** 650.288.3150

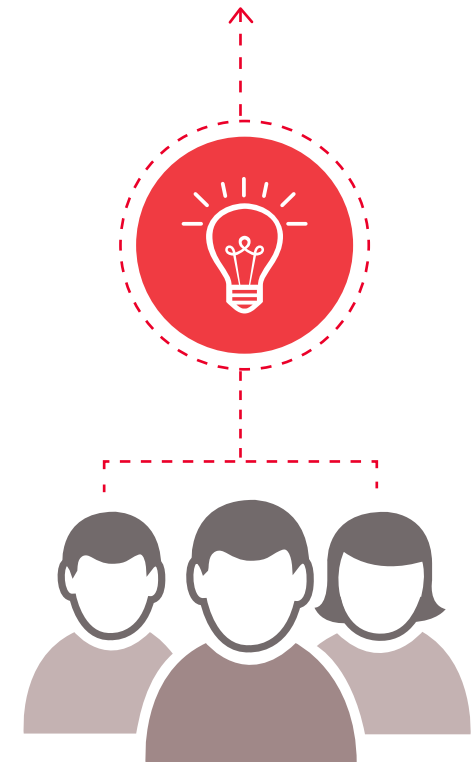
Related Reading

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

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

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SOCIAL





About DNN

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

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