

Community building and effective use of collaborative platforms

Tips for increasing online community engagement

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1. Introduction. Engagement means interaction and content.

Engagement in any online community focuses mainly on creating meaningful interactions between the community members around carefully selected and managed content. There are no strict rules of managing an online community successfully as each community is different. Trial and error is one of the ways to get to know your community members. This takes time and effort. Nevertheless, this document provides a list of guidelines that can be seen as general rules of conduct for the online community facilitators.

2. Content at the core of your community

- Provide content

Content needs to be provided by facilitator at the creation of the community. Content is the main trigger of discussions between members. Content should be provided on a frequent basis, depending on the item.

Recommended frequencies of updates:

- News – every week,
- Forum – facilitator should answer questions of members within 24 hours,
- Events – whenever an event around community topic is organised ; if possible an informal event can be organised every month to speak with the community members in person,
- eLibrary –every two weeks or once per month a new eLibrary item should be posted.

Facilitator is recommended to proactively search and post content to keep the conversations and knowledge exchange within his/her online community ongoing.

- Delete unwanted content

It is recommended to remove content that does not add value or stops the conversations. Facilitator should ask its author to delete the content and/or explain how it can be improved to the benefit of the community.

- Keep focus

It is important that community conversations are focused on the defined objectives of the community. The lack of focus can prevent members from coming back as their member's experience will lose value.

- Leverage good content

Leverage interesting content by reacting, asking additional questions to the authors and by adding your own ideas, if relevant.

3. Triggering interactions between members

- Connect on a long-term basis

Connecting with your members is not a one-time effort. Reach your members on a continuous basis: ask for comment, organise offline informal events (use them to meet your members and learn about their needs).

- Ask your members opinion

Ask questions to your members (e.g. Question of the week) as this will trigger members' interactions.

- Make connections

You do not need to be a social media expert in order to respond to your members' reactions. Be present and invest your time (minimum 3 times per week for around 30 minutes). Show, if relevant, that your members' contribution make a difference.

- Answer

Answer your members' questions in a timely manner (within 24 hours). This will show your members that you are there to listen. It is recommended to post content when members are the most active during the day (e.g. in the morning and early afternoon) to give them a chance to react.

- Post

Post should provoke a discussion. To do so, you can discuss current events, for example. Create short posts (around 80-140 characters) that will attract your members' attention.

4. Facilitator as a community leader (facilitator's profile)

- Identify members-leaders

Identify members providing the most valuable contributions. These members are very valuable assets in your community as they help you to add value. Let them know that their contribution matters.

- Act as a leader

Act as a community leader by:

- Being respectful, tolerant and open for criticism,
- Avoiding that members create a long stream of unrelated comments by leading the conversation and by encouraging members to interact .

5. Attracting members (boosting membership)

- Acquire members

Acquire new members by speaking about your community in the domain- related events, speak about it with your colleagues. However, focus only on inviting members that are relevant to your community objectives. A community with a considerable number of members (e.g.50) will attract more potential new members.

6. Community tools and functionalities

Facilitators are strongly recommended to learn how the platform and community tools can be used to communicate with members. Facilitators are welcomed to share all suggestions about desired new tools or improvements of the existing ones in the Community of Facilitators.

On the JoinUp platform, the following tabs are useful (see right upper corner on the JoinUp home page):

“A to Z”,

“Help”

“FAQ”.