



CMO's Guide: Building an Opt-in Community in the Technology Sector



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The professionals working in the technology sector have led the way when it comes to creating and building engaged online communities. Whether they are focused on particular products and services or providing best practice advice and free education (or both, as per the Cisco Support Community) online communities have the potential to help B2B technology service and solution providers:



There are hundreds of online communities out there now (this mind map shows 600 and it's not even scratching the surface) so how can you make yours stand out and how can you tell if you really have enough to share and say to warrant one? This handy checklist can help B2B organisations recognise if they are ready for their own online community.

If you then follow these steps to building a successful opt-in community, your business can benefit from improved performance in all of the areas above.

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1. Have a clear strategy and objectives

As the rise of social media has been so phenomenally fast many businesses have started using it as a bit of a knee-jerk reaction, with no clear idea of what they hope to achieve with it. To build an active and engaged opt-in community that will deliver value for all members, it needs to have a defined purpose and deliver focused content, which has been identified in your content marketing strategy.



It could be that you want your community to deliver all or just some of the points above – but whatever goals you set, your strategy must have definite steps, milestones and timescales, as well as scheduled reviews of progress, if it is to achieve them.

Resources:

[This article about the different types of online community out there](#) can help you to define what yours is or can be; and here are [40 tips for developing an online community strategy](#).

2. Get yourself a Community Manager

To be truly successful, a community needs a manager who is implementing the strategy, analysing results and identifying the changes and improvements needed to make it and keep it successful. Not only that, they are mediating, facilitating and provoking discussions while being a brand evangelist and attracting new members.



They are integral to all online communities as, without them, there is no one guiding the content or raising awareness of it in other communities that it will be of interest to.

Resources:

[Get more information on what a good Community Manager should do here.](#)

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3. Recruit core members to get opt-in members

Once you have established your goals for the community and appointed your Community Manager you need to recruit a core team to get it started. Ideally, this should be a mixture of in-house experts, customer advocates and industry commentators to give members an unbiased, valuable resource and space where they can discuss and debate current issues without feeling that they will be sold to.



Once you have this team in place, you can start delivering the content that will attract your opt-in members.

Resources:

Find out more in '[How to Build a Passionate Online Community](#)' and get some [recruitment strategies here](#).

4. Focus on quality, not quantity

Numbers and statistics are often seen as the best way to impress. Showing that you have a community with hundreds of members can be seen as a quick win at reporting time. However, if you've got 700 members and only a handful of them are active and engaged then the project can't really be classed as a success. If, however, you have 150 members and the vast majority of them are taking part in and instigating discussions and reacting to the content that you post, then you've got a community.



Use the personas you've developed for your marketing segmentation and concentrate on getting the members you want from those groups. See who's active in other communities and likely to add value to yours, then demonstrate how you can add value for them to get them engaged.

Resources:

There are some good insights into who makes a good community member in [Can you choose who is in your online community?](#)

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5. Get active

Taking part and linking out to content in other communities is vital so that members can see that your community is part of a wider one where they can really get value to help them do their job better. Also, they won't necessarily be looking to interact with you so you have to go and seek them out and engage with them in other forums to get them interested in your community.



Don't just go straight in there with links back to your site. Get chatting and add some value to discussions. Then they will come and see what's going on in your community. The content that you provide in your community, and in other people's, should be what has been planned in your inbound marketing content strategy.

Resources:

[Learn more here](#) about community etiquette and how to build trust.

6. Be committed

Building and maintaining a successful online community is a long-term commitment, so you need to have a long-term approach and vision. It won't deliver value overnight; engagement levels will go up and down, members will come and go.



But by having a clear strategy for it from the outset, which is aligned with your content marketing strategy, and recognition at all levels of the business that this is a long-haul project to improve the relationship that you have with your customers, your reputation in the market, your customer service levels, and product and service development, an online community can deliver real value.

Resources:

Make sure you [read these key challenges and common mistakes](#) people make when managing online communities so you can avoid them.

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to help you convince the
executive team that its
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