

MEDIA ENTREPRENEUR

MEETUP

Roundtable: Establishing and Growing an Online Community
June 2021

Key takeaways

Ask yourself why you are doing this at all

- Before you start, ask yourself if a community is really what you need to do
- Everything you do must serve the needs of your community, and not just what you need from them

"A community is a very specific thing. It's a group of like minded people that come together with a common purpose. If you want to grow an audience, you want more people turning up to events or buying your magazine, that's an audience and it's a different thing. A community is firstly about fostering the spirit of interest among a group of people...and then you can think to yourself, 'okay, well, I want a community, because I want to expand my knowledge. I want them to really bring to my business that intelligence, I want them to bring it to my magazine, I want them to bring it to my events, I want to recognize speakers I don't know about in the world yet'."

Don't mistake content for engagement, but content is your bread and butter

- Content alone will not produce a community your members value
- But content will give you most of your monetisation opportunities, and is a principle way of delivering member value

"The thing that keeps me up at night is mistaking content for engagement."

"Nobody wakes up in the morning and says 'I wish I had something more to read' but if it helps them do their job better, grow their company or stay in compliance, they will seek it out, and that's what creates all the monetisation opportunities."

Listen to the questions your community asks and produce content that answers those.

- Each day listen to what your community is talking about - or ask them!
- This will not only inform your community content, but also content in the rest of your business

"I'm kind of the nosy person who sticks my ear into the forum listening to what they're talking about. I then pick up the key trends, key things, and I'm not ashamed to say that one of my

editorial strategies is to pick up some of the stories, stick them in the microwave, reheat them and serve it back to them."

Step back and let your audience own the space

- Don't dictate the topics that your community should talk about, and don't over-organise

"What we do is kind of step back and let them own the space because if we intervene too much it almost feels like we are pulling the strings."

Everyone in your team should be active in your community

- Establish a rota and protocols for staff involvement
- Your content colleagues know the topic best, but not necessarily how to manage the community

"We've got one person specifically who looks after the community but then I think it's key that everyone in the team also rolls up their sleeves and gets in there because then that helps build trust between journalists and editors, whoever's running the site and also the people involved in it because they feel that you're part of their community and then there's respect."

"I would never get a journalist to manage a community."

What's In It For Me - isn't straightforward - people want to receive but also to share

- Give members the opportunity (e.g. via profiles) to share their success, as this is a driver for engagement

"We're all proud when we grow daffodils, you know, and we want to show what we're doing - 'isn't this great?!' etc. But sometimes we want to learn from others if the daffodils don't grow properly. 'What's that person doing right that I wasn't doing right?' and so people think 'if I'm going to contribute I've got to feel that there's value - other people are going to appreciate this value, and I'm going to get something from sharing but I'm also going to get something back from them as well'."

Monetisation - let me count the ways...

- Think carefully about monetisation, there are better opportunities around content than there are around charging for membership, and they won't hurt your numbers.

"I think sometimes we get into this mindset that we have to monetise this through subscription memberships - I'm just going to give you a quick list of all the different ways we've monetised communities: conferences, trade shows, online training, virtual events, industry award programs, SAAS businesses, research database validation, publishing, peer learning, online marketplaces, certification and sponsored memberships"

Metrics can be a rabbit hole

- Beware of rabbit holes around platforms and metrics
- Again, everything you do should serve your membership's interests first.

"Metrics are themselves a rabbit hole - because you can end up doing things to try and satisfy your own metrics without asking 'is this in the interests of the members of the community?'

That's what I keep having to stop myself doing at the moment."

Guest speakers:

Adam Smallman, Director Of Membership Programmes, PEI Media Group

Richard Hattersley, Editor, AccountingWeb

Moderator: Simon Crompton-Reid, Co-Host, Media Entrepreneur Meetup

John Owen Waller - SCI, Cerlin Roberts - Oxford Global, Carolyn Morgan - Special Media
Clare Dewhirst - City Nation Place, Daniel Kirmatzis - Hennik Group, Hannah Mitchell - Vault
Future Work, RD Whitney - OC365, Fergus Gregory - Collingwood Advisory, Sara Hook - Pulse
Conferences, Sophie Boissier - EPA.