



# **Ultimate Guide to Online Chats**

**Knowledgehub**

## The ultimate guide to running an online chat in your Knowledge Hub group

Online chats are one of the best examples of using the forum for community building.

Members meet at a set time to discuss issues of community relevance. These chats can generate tons of conversation, and build deep connections between the people taking part.

### What is an online chat?

Before you get into the meat of starting your own online chat, it's important that you know what is involved.

An online chat is when members use the group forum to talk about a common interest with others during a predetermined time. It is led by a designated moderator who will ask questions and facilitate the discussion.

Now that you have a better grasp of what an online chat actually is, you might be wondering whether running one is worth the effort for your community.

### Why you should host an online chat?

An online chat is more than just a fun event for your members. By participating in the conversation and injecting your relevant comments, you create opportunities to connect with new members. It also helps to:

- Enable members of your community to be identified as influencers
- Make new connections with relevant members
- Share valuable and informational content with your group
- Boost your activity through increased mentions and discussions surrounding your group.

Now that you know an online chat can benefit your group considerably, you need to know exactly how to run your own online chat.





## **How do you run an Online chat?**

Hosting an online chat involves a lot more than just coming up with a topic and asking questions. As tempting as it is to just jump in, you'll need to build a plan. We recommend you consider the following when creating an online chat strategy.

### **How to choose the topics**

Choosing a topic for your online chat is key. Having topics that are timely and interesting enough to encourage engagement will increase your chances of success. Hosting a chat on a topic that nobody's interested in talking about leads to a dead conversation.

A good way to come up with potential topics for your chat is to look through the recent content and discussions in your group. You should also follow trends in your subject area. When there's a controversial topic that pops up, people are going to be very open and willing to talk about it. Take advantage by hosting a chat about it.

Try to plan your chat topics out a few weeks in advance. That'll give you enough time to be prepared, but also have the freedom to change in case a new topic worth covering comes up.



Where you go to work together





### **What should you ask?**

Once you've decided on a topic, the next step is to come up with a list of thought-provoking questions. The questions you ask will make or break your online chat. Remember this is a conversation, not a survey. You need to ask open-ended questions that give your participants the opportunity to share their experiences and expand on their answers.

You don't want to ask questions that are too similar to each other or the conversation and answers can become redundant. Make sure you have enough variety in the questions you're asking to keep the conversation interesting. If you can anticipate how participants will respond to your questions, use that to help build the flow of your questions.

Try and keep your questions short and succinct. It sounds limiting, but it actually works to your advantage. Shorter questions can help you get to the point quicker instead of dragging out questions. In addition to the quality of questions you ask, also think about the quantity. Asking too many questions probably won't leave enough time for quality answers or engagement. At the same time, only asking two or three questions can make your chat short and uneventful.

Find a healthy balance for your members. Try between three and six questions, with about 10 to 15 minutes in between each one. That gives participants enough time to answer without feeling rushed to get to the next one.





### **How to choose the best time to hold an online chat**

This is going to differ with groups. Here are some variables to consider when deciding when to host your online chat:

- What's convenient for your participants?
- Where are your participants located?
- Are there other events going on around the same time?

Obviously, you can't cater to everyone, but try to settle on a time that's convenient for most people. You can always look at your Google Analytics for the times and dates that members visit the group the most and plan around these.

### **How to promote your online chat**

An online chat isn't that exciting if only two people show up. The more active members you can get, the more beneficial for everyone. So how do you get people to join in the conversation?

Leverage your existing group function. For instance, add an Event to your group, send out a range of Group Messages promoting the chat and highlight the event as a Group Announcement. When adding the online chat to your group's events listing, ask members to say if they would like to participate.

You can then create a list and @mention them before the online chat starts.





## How to manage the online chat

You've planned and planned and now it's finally time to launch. Assuming you didn't skim through the previous points, you've probably got at least a few people tuned in at the proper time.

Since you've planned your content in advance, your first step will be to kick off the chat with a welcome message that introduces the chat and sets the tone. Draft the first message in advance, to make sure the chat begins at the time your participants expect.

A few rules to adhere to during the chat:

- Questions and answers follow the above format (Q1/A1 structure for questions/answers)
- Frequency of questions in most chats ranges from five to 10 minutes
- Engaged chats have a minimum of 3 questions or as many as 6 to 10
- Adjust the number and timing of questions to fit your audience

During the chat, remember that you're the host and can nudge the conversation along. It also helps to:

- Like the best of your participants' answers
- Respond and probe deeper when you can
- Encourage elaboration with follow-up questions
- Don't forget to close the chat and thank everyone

Not only will this put the spotlight on your participants as the subject matter experts, it will create a livelier conversation.

As your chats grow and you get more participants, it's a good idea to get more people from your team involved to help manage them and join in. This will help you cover more ground and prevent participants from feeling ignored.



## **What do I do when the online chat has finished?**

First, give yourself a well-deserved pat on the back. However, you're not quite finished. Now it's time to measure, curate and learn.

### **Measure**

Look at the number of replies and views and have a quick look at the number of responses you had against each question. Was there a particular style of question that received more responses? How many members participated?

If you are connected to a lot of your group members, did you have an increase in the number of online connections during the online chat?

You can also check out google analytics to view the number of people who were looking at the discussion.

### **Curate**

Make sure to curate the best responses and conversation for later reference. If the conversation was particularly interesting or memorable, also consider bringing some of the best content together into a blog post or an article for the group. Highlight prominent community members and mine the responses for "quotable" nuggets.

### **Learn**

You'll find that some of your best learnings will come from looking back at the metrics and going through the content. These insights that will help you tweak the delivery of your next chat.



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