

Increasing member participation



Creating an active and thriving online group



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support@khub.net



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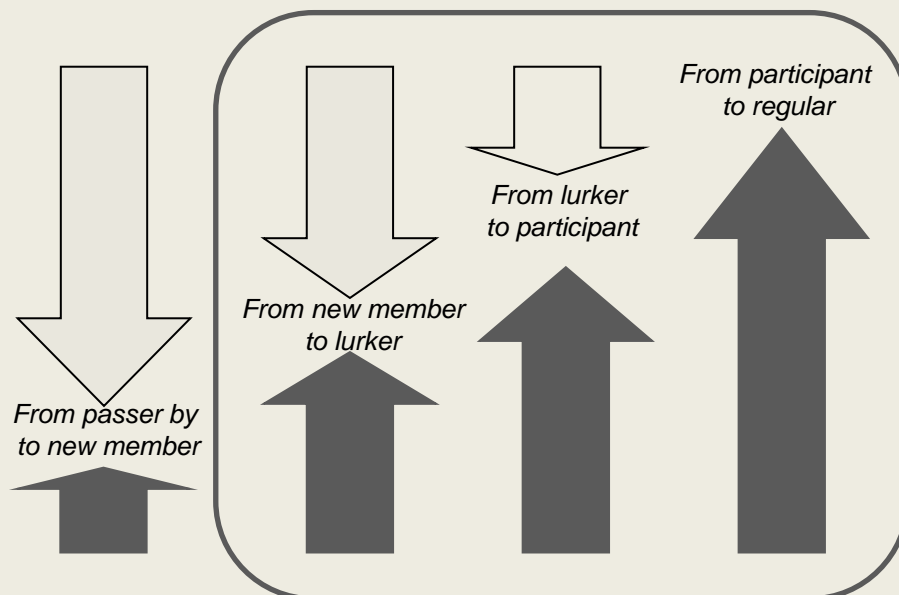
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Introduction

It can be a challenge generating good levels of engagement in your group. There are a number of barriers to participation including lack of time, fear of saying something you shouldn't and lack of confidence using digital skills. Low participation rates as a result mean that many online groups are not reaching their full potential.

But don't despair! There are always opportunities engage with members and increase participation in your group. This guide provides examples of how to attract new members and convert those who perhaps don't visit very often, or don't get involved the way you would like them to.

The ideal is to transform as many 'passers-by', 'new members' and 'lurkers' as possible into 'participants' and 'regulars'.



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Community Roundtable's most recent annual State of Community Management Report shows that strong group facilitation can dramatically increase participation levels compared to previous research.

1-9-90
Wikipedia 2006

10-20-70
Socius 2011

15-30-55
SOCM Average 2013



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From passer by to new member



Write engaging blogs – through a blog you can spread the word about your group and all it is achieving. You can highlight all the good things about being part of the group, tell people a bit about what you're discussing and entice passers by to take a closer look.



Use social media – making the most of relevant tools such as Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn you can raise the profile of your group, promote its activities, and attract new members. Simple updates on discussions, events and other activities can attract new members and increase participation.



Send targeted invitations – make a positive first impression by inviting people personally to your group. State clearly what the group is all about, why you'd really like them to join and what is in it for them.



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From new member to lurker



Send a welcome message – this is a great opportunity to welcome members properly and start them off on the right foot. Draw attention to key content and discussions and encourage them to get involved. Refresh your welcome message quite often to ensure it is up to date and relevant.



Follow up after a week – members can easily join the group, look around and then forget to come back. Get in touch with newcomers, make them feel part of the group by sharing something of interest/value to them and encourage them to participate.



Keep signposting – direct members to useful and interesting discussions, events and content. Highlight other members who are participating and always include a call to action to prompt contributions.



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From lurker to participant



Set up a welcome area – create a space for new members to introduce themselves. You might ask them to share their first-time experiences of the group. Provide a list of content and activities and ask them if anything is missing which would have been helpful.



Feature new members of the month – help the group get to know each other better, highlight who your new members are and celebrate the growth of your group. Use this opportunity to promote contributions made and encourage further participation.



Ask people to get involved – ask individuals for a contribution based on their ‘wants’ and ‘offers’. Find out specifically what members would like to gain from being part of the group (their wants), and if there are any skills, knowledge or experiences they would be willing to share (their offers).



From participant to regular



Feature a member of the month – create a buzz and some competition amongst members by recognising those who have made a significant contribution to the group during the month. Keep it interesting by changing what qualifies as a significant contribution.



Encourage contributions – there will be times when you know of particular members who can respond to a discussion, but sometimes they need a little nudge to get involved. Ask members directly – they are usually happy to contribute and value being asked.



Interview regular members – soon enough you'll get to know your regular members. Find out what it is that keeps them coming back, what have they achieved through their membership of the group, and what could others learn from them. Celebrate these successes.

