

10 top tips to create an active and vibrant online group

A Free E-Book created by
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Writing your groups purpose

The most important element of any group is one that builds a sense of belonging and trust, its purpose or sometimes called group description.

The group's purpose lays the path for where the group will journey and describes why it exists.

It is normally short, has colour and is designed to capture both hearts and minds. The statement has to be engaging, allow evolution, show the objectives, promote participation rather than control, and encourages ownership within the community.

The name of your group is key to the purpose and in any description online you will need to have the name of the group in the first sentence, and where possible the key words.

The rationale behind this is that when search engines are crawling the web they will be looking for a clear and concise name, and that the name is also used in the first sentence or paragraph of the description.

Key words relevant to the work area should also be included in the description.



Building your membership criteria

Who you accept and decline as members of your group can affect the trust and interactions within it.

Be clear from the start who is in and who is out. And remember to refresh it on a regular basis as the group matures.

When developing your community purpose, it's always worth looking at the membership that you would like for the community.

Ask the potential members who they believe should be included and excluded for the group.

By creating a list for accepting and declining members, this will narrow down the potential for any conflict within the group and any loss of trust.

Keep your inclusion and exclusion criteria simple so that all the facilitators can clearly follow it.



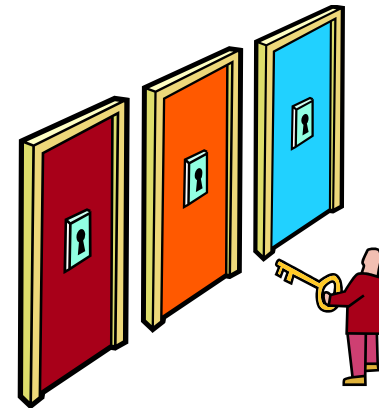
Preparing your accept and reject messages

Many acceptance messages focus on the point of converting visitors into members, but why go to all the effort of attracting new members if they don't contribute to the group?

A standard welcome message will include some kind of welcome message. What a waste! You want to make contributing to your group irresistible. Don't expect to write the acceptance message and leave it. See the acceptance message as something that is constantly evolving. Draw attention to fantastic content, great members and irresistible discussions. Keep it up to date and relevant.

When you decline a membership application, you need to determine what you want to happen next. Do you want them to wait six months and try again? Do you want them to get out of town and never visit your group again? Do you want them to do something first and immediately reapply?

You can't craft a good rejection message without knowing what you want to happen next. A lot of the time you will reject people due to incomplete profiles. The aim of a good rejection messages is to encourage those who have been rejected to immediately reapply.



Putting your measures in place

Google Analytics gives you a rich insight into your group's traffic. It shows you how people found your site and how they explored it.

The key data you will find from Google Analytics include:

- Visits, unique visitors, page views , average pages per visit, average visit duration , bounce rate and percentage of new visits

Adding Google Analytics is easy. Follow the instructions via:

<http://www.google.com/analytics/>

Look for the UA Code, which looks like this UA XXXX XXXX-X.

When you have the code:

- Go to the 'admin' tab of your group, expand 'general group settings', paste the UA code from Google Analytics into the box under 'monitoring your group', go back to Google Analytics and select 'save and finish'.

Please note: It will take between 12 and 24 hours before Google Analytics becomes active.



How to seed discussions

No one likes to join an empty community. In the same way that no one would stay at a party if no one was talking to each other. But getting the conversation started can sometimes be hard.

So why not fill in the blanks. Below are 10 questions that you can ask key members of your facilitation team and potential key members to help you create conversations.

1. What is your favourite
2. What advice would you give to someone who
3. Can anyone recommend
4. What is the best/worst
5. What are your top five
6. How would you handle (topical issue)?
7. Does anyone know how to.....?
8. Has anyone tried
9. What are the advantages of
10. I can't live without my



Building events and activities

Events are essential to growth in an online group. They provide activity and encourage members to visit more frequently.

They also help to build trust and provide a great opportunity for 'lurkers' to become participants.

Events can be online or offline.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Webinar - a presentation, lecture, workshop or seminar that is transmitted over the web.
- Hotseat - a forum discussion focused on participants asking a person or persons in the hotseat questions.
- Themed discussion
- Workshop
- Conference



Creating the right content

Members come for the content but they stay for the community. So you need to know what types of content encourage participation rather than just visitors.

A key point is keeping a constant stream of content. Uploading everything on day one will normally cause the group to die within weeks.

There are three types of content to look out for:

- **Institutional Content (IC)** - content that is created by the lead organisation or governing body.
- **User Generated Content (UGC)** - content that is contributed by members on their own accord or upon request.
- **Community Narrative Content (CNC)** - content about the members that increase the sense of togetherness felt.

The sign of a truly thriving online community is when more than 40% of the content is driven by or created by the members.



Writing the invitation

When writing a message to invite people to join your group, make sure you include three things.

1. The name of the group (hopefully an obvious one).

2. Why you are inviting them

You have identified your audience, and explaining to them why they have been invited is critical. Include how they can help to raise the profile of the work area and have a voice in the direction of the group.

3. What's in it for me?

Ensure you include the benefits for taking part in a group. For example:

- new opportunities
- professional development
- collaboration with others
- sharing knowledge
- developing best practice



Signposting members

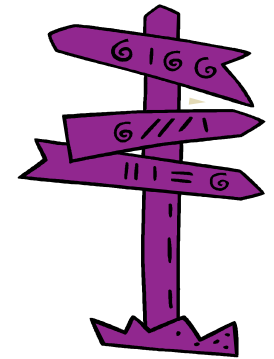
Where you can, direct members to the discussions, events and content that you wish to promote or encourage participation in.

Highlight the members that are participating or uploading content and use calls to action such as:

- Download now!
- Share your thoughts
- I urge you to
- Top rated
- Easy to Use

Your signposts should direct members to:

- Top discussions
- Newest documents
- Latest events
- Member blogs
- Discussions that need an answer



Communicating with members

Messaging your members on a regular basis creates a ritual.

They will expect to see the message and become disappointed if they are not receiving the latest updates from the group.

When you are writing your message this is your chance to grab your members' attention to spark debate and increase engagement within your group. You can also use some of the calls to action tactics from signposting.

There are two types of messages that you may wish to use:

1. **Nudges** (weekly messages) are a great opportunity for you to showcase your group's best content, put members in the spotlight and encourage them to get involved.
2. **Newsletters** (monthly messages) provide a round-up or summary of the latest activity from the group and upcoming activities that are of interest to its member.

Use positive language and members names to draw members into the group and encourage participation.



Inspired by

Richard Millington www.feverbee.com

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Martin Reed <http://www.communityspark.com/>

Vanessa DiMauro – <http://www.leadernetworks.com/>

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