

Hotseats

“We asked the community what they want to see and provide a range of activities such as hotseats.”

Hotseats are a useful tool that can be used within an online group. They enable participants to ask the person or persons in the hotseat questions, which they can post over a set period of time.

This technique creates a large amount of contributions and activity within the group.

Normally these questions and answer session are hosted within the forum to help capture the responses.

Who ‘sits’ in the hotseat?

The person(s) in the hotseat range from experts in their field, practitioners wishing to share and practitioners looking for advice, and are known as the hotseat ‘host(s)’.

How long should they last? The hotseat can last for as long as is needed but most range from 2 hours to a full day. This is very much dependent on the depth of the issues and time commitments of the person(s) in the hotseat.

Different types of hotseats

They are multiple ways that a hotseat can be organised and hosted within an online group:

Discussion-based – An article or think piece is uploaded to the group to start an initial discussion around the topic area. It needs to be short and punchy and look to stimulate discussion and sometimes even a little controversy.

Presentation-based – Embedding slideshows into the group from websites such as Slideshare.net and Google Docs is common. A copy should be made available in the document library, just in case participants are blocked from using media streaming sites. The slides should be simple to follow and be read and understood without commentary.

Video-based – Videos are a great way to disseminate information, and questions can be asked to conclude the video clip. They need to be kept short and succinct. You also have the option to include demonstrations or visuals with the video clip.

Panel Discussion – This is an expanded version of the discussion but allows two or three people’s opinions to be put forward to the group for discussion, and is very similar to a face to face panel.

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“Hotseats work best when you have an ‘expert’ leading the discussion so that is not just a stream of questions.”

Before

- Promote the event via the calendar, group message, newsletters and contacting members direct.
- Assist the hotseat host(s) to register, set up a profile and sign into the group, if they are not already a member.
- Advise on how to gain the best response from the topic.
- Provide a contact email address and mobile phone number for technical support.
- Identify a few members you can go to during any quiet periods to help encourage participation in the hotseat.
- Create the hotseat forum thread on the arranged date.

During

- Aim to answer questions within the time period.
- If you need to check the facts use a holding statement to reassure the respondents that they have not been ignored.
- Acknowledge when a respondent has introduced an idea or information which could influence the thoughts on policy - it is a powerful motivator.
- Establishing the right tone is essential for success, valuing the participants will build long term goodwill and encourage them to return.
- As the dialogue builds - check back for any responses to the questions - these may be higher up the page and will be flagged.

After

- At the end of the hotseat place a ‘closed forum’ post and thank all the contributors and include a closing statement from the hotseat host(s).
- Edit the title of the Hotseat to include “Closed”.
- Any outstanding replies can be posted or sent directly to the facilitator and these will be sent on to the host(s).
- Provide a summary to show the questions asked and by whom and the responses made by the hotseat host(s). Send a summary of the dialogue to the hotseat host(s) for approval. Then publish to the document library and post a link to it from the closed hotseat post.