Macmillan Fosters Interactive Support Community

Macmillan Cancer Support is a charity dedicated to providing specialist healthcare, information and financial support to people impacted by cancer. With a reach extending to more than 4.9 million people, Macmillan delivers practical, medical, emotional and financial support in its mission to reach and improve the lives of everyone affected by cancer.

Challenge

Connect people affected by cancer for engagement and ongoing support

Macmillan provides comprehensive support and services to those with a cancer diagnosis as well as their friends and family. Its work spans across many different services, such as fundraising, support centers and groups, benefits and financial advisers, medical information and more. In addition to these services, Macmillan wanted to create an online channel for people to connect with one another 24/7.

“When you’re affected by something as life altering as cancer, it’s important to talk to people who’ve had similar experiences, in addition to clinical aid and medical support.”

Laura Goss, Online Community Manager, Macmillan Cancer Support

Many people impacted by cancer describe their experience as a journey. Macmillan wanted to give people a way to describe each step of the way, communicate with peers for support and get more information on the services that Macmillan provides to cancer patients.

Solution

Created interactive online community for peer advice and support

Based in the UK, Macmillan decided to build a community that is open to people worldwide. More than 62,000 people form the community, including members from the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. The community is integrated into its website and designed to match the existing look and feel of the brand.

“People impacted by cancer want to hear from people with similar experiences – they want to engage with others who have walked in their shoes and can shed light on how to cope,” says Goss. “We built an online community that enables cancer patients and their loved ones across the globe to sign up as a member in the community and engage their peers.”

Many members create blogs to document their stories, while others provide comments offering support and adding their own experience. Macmillan also blogs about relevant news to keep members up to date on events, campaigns...
and available services for financial and health support. The community manager also features members’ blog posts in the community to highlight noteworthy entries.

Status updates are used to post short announcements or get feedback quickly. For example, sometimes members will post if they’re having a particularly tough day or simply want a bit of advice. “Members appreciate the ability to quickly reach out to the community,” says Goss. “Sometimes people just want to share their feelings and get instant feedback from the community with words of reassurance or helpful information.”

Members typically engage one another in topic-specific discussions in sub-groups in the community. These groups are related to different types of cancer as well as issues such as fundraising, volunteering, campaigns and more. This enables members to have focused conversations with like-minded peers about the issues or activities they’re handling.

In the breast cancer group, for example, members share their experiences and ask for advice. People in the community provide feedback, often offering recommendations based on personal experience, words of consolation or additional resources they found helpful in their own lives.

Real-time chat, which is integrated into the community via a third-party provider, engages members in scheduled conversations with different specialists or with other members about particular healthcare topics. Macmillan posts transcripts from the scheduled chats for members to revisit and provide comments. Chat is available 24/7 for members to support and share with one another.

Members can also add specific blogs, forum discussions and other content to their favorites to quickly locate helpful information or discussions. In addition, members tag content with key words, which are aggregated in tag clouds for members to easily access popular topics.

In addition to social engagement, members can also access clinical information, donate to Macmillan and learn how to get actively involved with the charity.

“We blend authoritative clinical information with community conversations,” says Goss.
“Our members want access to different types of knowledge and information, which is what our website and community delivers.”

Due to the sensitive topics in the community, Macmillan employees are equipped with guidelines to interact with members. This ensures that employees are prepared to manage community activity, and members know what information is safe to share.
Macmillan is very active in social media, using it as a way to promote awareness of its cause and inform people about its services. Using Facebook, Macmillan shares new services, resources and upcoming events so that Macmillan advocates can spread the news to their social networks.

> **Improved health care experience:** “The community helps make the difficult cancer experience better for members who participate. During an isolating, frightening time, the community can help people to confront the situation, share what they’re going through with a supportive group of peers and find helpful resources,” says Goss.

> **24/7 peer-based support:** Members can talk to each other 24/7 about the issues that are on their minds and research other people’s experiences. “It’s incredibly encouraging that people are so active in the community and keep supporting one another in the face of difficult circumstances,” says Goss.

> **Increased awareness of additional services:** Macmillan is able to cross-promote its services throughout the community and via its social media channels. This enables Macmillan to reach more people affected by cancer and ensure that people find the services right for their situations.

**Results**

**Stronger support channels and healthcare experiences for people impacted by cancer**

The community’s reach is steadily expanding worldwide to people affected by cancer. With more than 60,000 members, the community continues growing with about 1,000 new members joining each month.