

Helping Your Online Community Succeed

Introduction

Building an online community can help your organization create exceptional relationships with its customers, advocates, and staff. It can also help future-proof your business by giving you unique insight into market conditions and the services you need to provide to stay ahead of build and maintain an online community:

Creating and Maintaining the Infrastructure

The infrastructure of your community is obviously critical. Here are some things to consider as you develop and deploy the technology that underpins your community:



- **Ensure your design and user experience are of high quality.** Designing for a community experience brings new design challenges and solutions for sites that seek to embrace the collective interest of members. Sites can foster valuable contributions if they're designed with two goals in mind: first, to show the unique value of the community, and second, to make it easy to browse and contribute.
- **Provide integrations that the users need.** Not so long ago, integrations were often complex and expensive elements, but Telligent now offers integrations and add-ons on [Github.com/Telligent](https://github.com/Telligent). This makes the platform more straightforward to work with than ever before, presenting new opportunities for everyone, whether you are a customer or a partner.
- **Stay up to date with the latest version of the software.** As a customer, your community platform is a long-term investment. If you fall too far behind the current version, you may find that support is discontinued. You also miss out on the improvements in scalability, performance, security and all of the new features that come with the latest versions.
- **Collect or act on platform metrics.** Analytics such as those provided by [Telligent, A Verint Company](#)[®] can measure community activity, so you can gather valuable insights on where your community is succeeding while uncovering areas that need improvement. The Telligent Community[™] solution provides a comprehensive set of social intelligence reports organized into dashboards that can empower community managers and administrators to understand what is working well, what is less effective, and how they can adjust their community to work more effectively.
- **Technical bugs will happen.** Some are probably inevitable – and you should make sure you have support hours available, so that experts can help resolve issues and bugs when they're identified.

Using analytics to report on social activity, you can identify top contributors, evaluate networks, track user participation, and reveal key performance indicators such as time-to-solution, answer rates, most viewed pages, and most popular downloads. In addition to social analytics, Telligent analytics provides web analytics that can deliver rich insights into community traffic. Armed with this insight, you can plan more enhancements and extensions to your community more effectively.

Community: Determining the ROI

Some organizations undoubtedly do succeed in building effective, business-critical communities organically. Their communities may be fine in many ways – yet they may never quite attract the enthusiasm nor deliver the desired results. Others embark on the journey only to find the task more complex than they expected. If your community is not yet delivering world-class value, don't despair. A community can sometimes be slow to attract an audience, or it may attract a lot of talk but little that converts into a hard return. You are certainly not alone, and there are a lot of fairly simple steps that can help you on your way.

Chances are, even if your own community is doing well – there are areas that you could improve. If you haven't given it a recent and thorough health-check, looking both at the technical performance and the business planning behind it, you may be missing some tips and tricks, and losing out on potential returns as a result.

Many business reasons can be the cause behind an unsuccessful ROI of a community

For example:

- Your business circumstances have changed, so the original planning needs to be revisited.
- Some parts of the business don't understand how the community can help them.
- Governance of the community is confused, restrictive or limited.
- There aren't enough resources (time or money) to support the community.
- There are problems marketing the community, or attracting (or retaining) the attention of the potential audience.
- The effectiveness of the community isn't being measured properly.

Community: Value behind the scenes

A community doesn't automatically help increase sales or profits for a company. It can, but not in the traditional sense of sales teams focused on upcoming monthly targets. Community involves something much softer, more round-about. It plays a longer game. It involves creating and sustaining a set of relationships where communication plays a key role. The benefits to the business may eventually be real, but they are rarely obvious.

Each element of a community should be designed to make it evident why a customer or partner should become a contributing member. Demonstrating the value of the community in its design can build trust in the information, help increase the number of contributions and foster a vibrant community; all while building longer-term commitment and connections between members. At the highest level, community design should show value in every part of the user experience and make it easy for members to contribute to the creation of that value through making helpful contributions.



Promoting Your Community and Measuring Success

There's more to building a successful online community than choosing and implementing the underlying technology. How will you make the business case for your community? How will you launch it? How will you promote it, measure your success, and keep your content fresh and relevant? Here are some tips that can help:

- **Draw up a value map.** How does (or could) the community benefit its individual members? The main teams in your organization? How would it contribute to achieving the overall goals of the organization? Clear answers to these simple questions can help you build strong arguments for a community that is supported at every level.
- **Talk to your executives.** Do they understand the importance of what you're doing? Are they prepared to support it by being active community members? Your chances of success will be dramatically improved by a few well-planned interventions from the top of the organization.
- **Check the values, vision, and mission** of your organization and tighten up all the ways your community contributes to delivering them.
- **Offer people something they can't get anywhere else.** People won't visit your community just because you've built it; you need to offer them a reason to come. Brainstorm the unique selling proposition of your community and make it evident on every page and in every communication you send out.
- **Create a culture of safety.** A community needs to feel safe to everyone who uses it, so draw up a table of risks and mitigations. Find out why some *don't* engage at the moment, and make sure you can address all of their concerns. Then, make sure the doubters know the dangers will be outweighed by the benefits.
- **Build a team** of champions, advocates, early adopters, enthusiasts. Get them to share their ideas with one another, and then disseminate your findings.
- **Collect case studies** of how your community benefits people. Even better, gather case studies of how it benefits any teams that use it. Tell everyone about them—make them want a piece of the action.
- **Run a sentiment survey.** How does your audience feel about your organization and your community? What would they like the community to do for them? What are their frustrations? The results can provide great insight into how you change what you provide – and will also provide a benchmark for proving your efforts have made things better.
- **Stop measuring activity** on the community, and start measuring the ways in which it provides value to the individual members and to the business.
- **Promote your community** as much as you can. Use SEO, social media, newsletters, email, word-of-mouth – whatever you can afford and wherever's appropriate for your audience. And wherever you can, use community-generated content and community voices themselves to do it. People need to know that they won't be wasting their time by joining—and the best way to find that out is to read the valuable content that's posted there.



Selecting Tools and Processes to Help

When creating and maintaining an online community, a program such as [simplysucceed](#) can be highly beneficial. Delivered by a company of the same name, simplysucceed incorporates an online community tool (built on [Telligent Community™](#)) and offers:

- A rich suite of tools, templates, checklists, and advice on all aspects of setting up and running a community
- A community of practitioners from organizations large and small, who have all set up and run communities
- A range of resident experts able to offer advice and consultancy (both technical and business), whether online or face-to-face.

simplysucceed's tools, templates, and checklists are organized into modules tied to the various stages of online community development, from proving the business case to planning the launch to driving adoption. If you have an existing community, you can take advantage of simplysucceed's [free health check](#) to gain more insight into its strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, the health of a *community platform* depends on working well and offering the users what they need, while the health of the *community itself* depends on its reach, depth, and quality of interactions. The tips provided above address both of these key areas. By continually assessing and refining your community, you can keep your community active, vibrant, and highly effective as a means for differentiating and strengthening your brand.

simplysucceed

simplysucceed is a consultancy devoted to helping organizations embed social at the heart of the way they work—whether internal or customer-facing. The company offers a unique, online program to help organizations implement and support customer-facing, branded communities, along with consultants with hands-on experience implementing employee social networks and collaborative forums.

Telligent, A Verint Company

Telligent®, A Verint® Company is a leader in software for customer support and digital marketing communities. Its social software solutions help bring together modern collaboration technologies into a single integrated suite that includes social applications and services that enable organizations to create communities of interest for their customers.

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