

Engaging your online community [checklist]

Online communities are the bread and butter of product marketing, as they allow you to:

- Interact with your target audience
- Share information with current and prospective customers
- Get feedback about your product
- Save product costs as users can help you tweak it
- Boost your credibility and trustworthiness
- Increase brand awareness
- Improve product adoption rates
- Showcase how knowledgeable you are
- Get product support before it goes live
- Get a product to market faster, and so much more!

So, it's clear that growing your online community is crucial, as it'll allow you to reap these and other key benefits.

To do this, you'll need to engage your target audience and ensure they're satisfied every step of the way, not only with your offerings but also with the platform you're using to communicate and interact with them.

This checklist aims to help you engage your community, so you can make the most of what it has to offer.

Understand your audience

No two customers are the same – while they may share certain characteristics, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach that can be applied.

Make sure you know who your audience is, from their needs to their pain points, which can help you to build target messaging that works, understand what works for the particular subset of the community that you're targeting, etc.

- ☐ Review the data you have on your audience (from Google Analytics or your own system, for example).
 - ☐ Conduct surveys and interviews to help you understand your audience in more detail.
 - ☐ Perform market and competitor research.
 - ☐ Monitor the feedback you receive, as well as the comments you get.
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- ☐ Define who you *don't* want to market to, which can help you get a better grasp of your audience.
 - ☐ Revise and adapt your information as new data comes in.

Be available

It goes without saying that, to keep your community engaged, you must be there for them:

- ☐ Create buzz for your product with content.
- ☐ Reply to messages in a timely manner.
- ☐ Keep the conversation going if the chat is too quiet.
- ☐ Get a team dedicated to building relationships with the members of your community.
- ☐ Provide resources.
- ☐ Don't just interact with your community when you need something – help them whenever you can.
- ☐ Use a platform that allows you to chat in real time.

Be knowledgeable

Knowing what you're talking about is always important.

When engaging with your audience, make sure you can speak their language and cut the fluff – sometimes, customers prefer a straight-to-the-point approach.

- ☐ Participate in discussions, and answer questions.
- ☐ Solve a problem your community members have.
- ☐ Speak at a peer level (and avoid “the sell”).
- ☐ Create product documentation and other valuable assets.
- ☐ Showcase your knowledge of your product, from its features to its benefits.
- ☐ Be genuine and authentic.

Have a strategy

Building an engaged community is hard, so having a strategy from the get-go can pay off down the line. So, before you start communicating and interacting:

- ☐ Map out all your ideas ahead of time and come up with schedules (for example, when will you be online to answer questions?).
- ☐ Tailor your messaging to your audience.
- ☐ Always keep the audience in mind (and ask yourself how you can help them).
- ☐ Offer content and resources that are valuable and actionable.
- ☐ Avoid trying to sell, and adopt an educational approach.
- ☐ Consider your brand/company's values.
- ☐ Figure out your audience's needs and pain points.
- ☐ Come up with a value proposition that guides your community and helps all stakeholders communicate.

Develop a champion program

Everyone likes to be part of something, so this is your opportunity to build a champion program that allows them to shine and become even more engaged with the community – while helping you to raise brand awareness and promote your products.

- ☐ Identify why you need a program (do you want to increase your reach, for example?).
- ☐ Reward the contributions of the most active members of the community and allow them the opportunity to join your program.
- ☐ Think about who can be a champion – consider the posts they've made, whether they answer other questions from other community members, if they talk about your product on social media, etc.
- ☐ Make sure your champions can benefit from being in your program, which will keep them engaged. For instance, PMMs should be able to make new connections, have access to knowledge they didn't have before, give their career a boost, and more.
- ☐ Encourage people to apply and let them know what's expected of champions.
- ☐ Test your current program and tweak it as you go.

Listen to your community

Everyone likes to feel listened to and that their contributions are valued.

Ensure that you:

- ☐ Act on, and/or acknowledge feedback.
 - ☐ Give them the opportunity to participate in beta testing.
 - ☐ Involve active community members in your champion program.
 - ☐ Follow conversations and take note of any patterns (a common issue your community seems to be facing, for example).
 - ☐ Add new product features that solve a problem.
 - ☐ Survey your community for improvements you can make.
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Use gamification tactics

Gamification in online communities can work well to keep your audience interested in what you have to offer, as well as actively participating in the community.

There are many benefits to such a strategy, including an increase of the engagement rate, which is key to growing your online community. With gamification techniques, you want to create a sense of competition, but not too much that it becomes harmful.

Some gamification ideas you may want to experiment with include:

- ☐ Badges – these can be awarded to people that achieve something important in the community, such as number of posts.
 - ☐ Reputation scores – these can help other members to see the top influencers in the community.
 - ☐ Prizes – you can give out prizes after a competition or reward people who've reached a goal you set out during a specific month, for example.
 - ☐ Have a leaderboard – this'll reward top contributors while motivating other members to continue engaging in the community in order to reach the leaderboard as well.
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- ☐ Offer privileges – once a member of the community has reached a certain milestone, you can offer them access to features/privileges other members don't have, for instance.

Encourage good behavior

While this may seem obvious, it's important to set some rules and guidelines for the community, so everyone's aware of what they should and shouldn't do/say. If you're unsure what guidelines to put in place, think about your company's values – your community should reflect them.

This way, you can foster a healthy, inviting, and fun environment people will want to spend time in, as well as engage with others.

Some actions you can take include:

- ☐ Set the rules for what's good and bad behavior – and what merits a ban.
 - ☐ Communicate them to everyone clearly (through documentation, for instance).
 - ☐ Promote good behavior by leading by example.
 - ☐ Intervene whenever there's bad behavior to ensure the community remains healthy and safe for everyone.
 - ☐ Tweak your community's guidelines as you go (and grow), so you can adapt to new behaviors.
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- ☐ Remove spammers from the community as soon as possible.
 - ☐ Block users who don't follow the community's guidelines.
 - ☐ If necessary, add moderators to the community, so they can uphold good behavior and handle disruptive users.
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