

## Best Practices for Building Online Communities

Online communities serve a variety of business goals, such as providing service and support, fostering innovation, and building brand equity.

Although each community is different, all communities share some basic principles that can guide you through the building process. Ten of them follow:

### 1. Start Small

Focus on one specific goal, such as generating ideas for a new product feature or creating a peer-to-peer support forum. Then expand the community by adding more functions incrementally.

**Why it's important:** New communities with overreaching scopes fail to give new members a driving sense of purpose, take longer to launch, often sacrifice quality for quantity, and risk losing internal support before they begin.

### 2. Design with Potential Members in Mind

Consider your potential members' motivations and interests as you build spaces for interaction. Don't neglect members' desires to express themselves and to find useful content.

**Why it's important:** If members find your community uninteresting, manipulative, or difficult to navigate, they simply won't engage—and the community will flounder.

### 3. Prevent Anonymity

Require people to register and log in before participating in the conversation.

**Why it's important:** Anonymous posts stifle trust among members and can open the door to trolls (people who post inflammatory messages to provoke an emotional response) and flaming (posting of hostile messages).

### 4. Focus on First Impressions

Seed the community with members, groups, activities, and content before launching. Draw your first members from employees, existing customers, partners, and industry leaders who are willing to participate.

**Why it's important:** Visitors know an empty community when they see one, and they won't waste their time with a community that can't offer them information or networking opportunities.

## 5. Get Early Buy-in from Internal Influencers

Recruit a business sponsor who can maneuver within the organization, maintain key relationships, and secure resources.

**Why it's important:** Every community needs an influential cheerleader to make sure that top executives and other stakeholders recognize the community's value and continue to support it with funding and other resources.

## 6. Designate a Full-Time Community Manager

This person should handle member engagement and moderation as well as provide ongoing training and support opportunities.

**Why it's important:** A community requires enough attention to warrant having a full-time employee dedicated to it. Tracking, technical support, member engagement, and community program and event planning are just a few of the tasks involved.

## 7. Plan for Growth

Identify the mechanisms (in both process and technology) that will enable the community to expand smoothly. For example, designate a team to respond to member questions and make sure your platform can evolve painlessly.

**Why it's important:** If your community succeeds, growth will be inevitable. If a sudden spike in traffic strains servers, for example—or if you haven't adopted the latest community tools—members may leave the community for good.

## 8. Evolve Organically

Leave room for unintended positive developments, such as member groups that emerge from the ground up. Let members take leadership roles as appropriate, and let them contribute to community development.

**Why it's important:** The best parts of a community emerge from the complex, dynamic interplay among members. Stifling those natural interactions tends to impede progress and growth.

## 9. Make It Easy to Register

Make the commitment small—don't ask for too much personal information up-front. You can always ask for additional information later (for a limited community event, for instance).

**Why it's important:** People shy away from lengthy forms, and they don't like to divulge a lot of personal information—especially if they don't see the immediate value of doing so.

## 10. Connect to the Outside World

Link to related sites and articles, and keep members informed about conferences and events.

**Why it's important:** Making yourself an indispensable source of information is the best way to keep members coming back.

## CONTACT US

For more information on building online communities, visit [oracle.com/rightnowcx](http://oracle.com/rightnowcx).

**ORACLE®**