Richard Millington's
Online Community Manifesto

We need to change our approach a little...

The Problem

For the purposes of building online communities, we know 200% about technology. That's 100% too much.

By comparison we know just 50% about communities.

We don't really understand why communities happen. We don't understand (or don't respect) that building online communities requires a remarkable talent. It requires the skill of motivating and bonding human beings like ourselves. Evidence of this neglect is all around the online community sphere.

Why can we name dozens of social media platforms, but not a single psychological breakthrough since Freud?

Why don't recruiters ask online community managers for community developing experience?

Why don't online and offline community builders talk to each other?

So this is my manifesto. Lets forget half of what we know about technology and double what we know about communities.

Things To Change

We love the internet a little too much.

Learning technology is easier than learning people. Technology is an inputs, outputs process. It's easy once you know how. People aren't so robotic. People worry about the little things. Things like appreciation, rewards, meaning etc...

There aren't any answers in this manifesto. Instead it's something better, it's a call to change how we approach online communities.

If that's the case, there are three things we need to change *right now*

1) **We need to become experts on communities.**

2) **We need to change how we plan online communities.**

3) **We need to rethink the role of technology.**

Become Experts On Communities

We have to accept the less sexy part of building online communities – the fiddly, irrational and entirely unpredictable community bit. We have to learn to love some concepts that are crucial to online communities.

The first is psychology. Psychology is a huge topic, way too big to cover in our lifetimes – just like technology. We don't need to learn all of it, just the important parts. We need to know the principles for the frameworks, like the 4Ps of marketing.

We also need to know what motivates people. We need to know the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. We need to know how to create communities founded upon these motivations.

Our blogrolls need to include names like Jeremy Dean, The Situationist and Of Two Minds. We need to read and reflect on what they discuss. We need to learn who we need to know whose work we should be reading.

Finally, we need to know more about sociology. How do groups form and interact? How are communities likely to react to different actions and influences? This is important stuff.

Speak To Our Organizing Cousins

We need to develop an online platform that lets us talk to our community organizing. We, together, as the community of online community managers need to find and invite the top community developers to blog. We need to bring them into our world, we have far too much to learn from them.

We need to learn the frameworks of developing online communities. We need to know what's written in most of the community developing guides and how that applies to us. I'm better nearly all of it will.

The more an online community manager surrounds himself with smart community builders, the better s/he will be.

Plan Communities For People, Not Machines

The next step is changing how we plan online communities.

Lets stop picking technology before members. Every single community imaginable benefits from deciding which members they want first. That's the first step. You should pick your members before making any other decision. Pick your members before you've picked which biscuits to use at the staff meeting.

Once you've picked who you want to reach, you need to identify what matters *to them*. Then you need to develop a framework for an online community that would work for them. This means following the community development process.

Plan a community that offers members what they want. Learn their motivations . Plan milestones and rewards for reaching those milestones. Use it to develop a community that no longer violates half the rules of successful group formation.

Develop an online community framework that works appeals to the motivations of human beings. Some are self-motivated, others want rewards like recognition or money. Learn about personality types. What sort of personalities is your community going to attract? What is likely to motivate them?

What's Technology Really For Anyway?

We need to unravel ourselves from technology a little. We forget that community is the noun, online is the fancy dressing.

We've forgotten the purpose of technology. Technology exists to *make communication easier*. It doesn't exist to let us do things we wouldn't have bothered to do anyway.

Second, we need to remember that the internet is a process. It's not a destination. An online community is still, essentially, an off-line community. It's comprised of real people. These real people are using the internet because it's more convenient than meeting in real time or sending chain letters.

Every technological tool you use should have some psychological reasonging.

Nothing gets picked because it's new, nor fancy. Only use Twitter if there is a clear personality type within your community (which you've spotted because you know how to identify personality types) that would be motivated to use it.

The Murky Future

I'm serious about this manifesto.

I didn't know how serious until I began writing, it went from a blog post, to a blog series to an entire manifesto.

I fear our community organizing cousins as much as I love them. When they wake up and realise just how much businesses need their expertise, we're going to have some ferocious competition on our hands.

Which might might be just the wake-up call we need.

Technology is going to get easier every day. If we base our value upon knowing how to use technology, we're not going to survive.

However, if we base our value on understanding how communities develop and what makes them tick, we're going to be in high demand for the foreseeable future.

Thanks for reading.

About Richard Millington

Richard Millington is the author of FeverBee, a blog about building online communities.

In recent years Richard has worked with a range of companies to develop online communities including AMD, Seth Godin at Squidoo, MoreEco and Future Publishing.

Richard is presently working with BAE Systems Inc to launch an online community in the new year.

You can read more of his thought on his blog: www.feverbee.com and you can reach him by e-mail richard@feverbee.com.