FeverBee

COMMUNITY MANAGMENT COURSE

Online Community Strategy Template

SUMMARY

Your online community strategy document begins with a statement summarizing the key learning of your research. For example:

> *This strategy highlights several internal issues facing the community and suggests methods to address said issues. The key issues facing the community include:*
> - *Issue A*
> - *Issue B*
> - *Issue C*
>
> *To resolve these issues, this strategy recommends:*
> - *Action H*
> - *Action I*
> - *Action J*
>
> *We believe the following objectives can be achieved within the next three months:*
> - *Objective X*
> - *Objective Y*
> - *Objective Z*
>
> *{Name}*
> *{Organization}*
> *{Email Address}*
> *{Phone Number/ Alternate Contact Details}*

Given that this is a summary of all the work that is yet to be finished, this section will be the last piece that you write.

CONTENTS

1.0 COMMUNITY BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Begin by reviewing or establishing the objectives. You want to connect the objectives to clear ROI metrics. If they're not, then criticize these and stress the need to better identify the objectives that logically linked to increased revenue, reduced costs, or fulfillment of the organization's mission (non-profits only).

Very often, the objectives are a few layers removed from the actual ROI e.g. (increase engagement). In this case, you need to highlight how that engagement helps the organization such as increased repeat purchases.

The objectives should be one of the following:

- Increased retention
- Increase repeat purchases
- New revenue opportunities
- Attract new customers
- Reduced marketing costs*
- Reduced customer-service costs
- Feedback and innovation
- Recruitment
- Improved productivity (internal)
- Decrease staff turnover (internal)
- Fulfilment of mission (non-profit only!)

You can have more than one objective, but not more than three. List the objectives by order of priority. This should have a clear link to the broader organization's strategy. If the organization is hemorrhaging customers, a community can improve retention rates, for example.

You might even be able to make value-based projects here. For example, what is average customer spending per year? Now you know that {x} members could lead to {x} increase in revenue.

2.0 INTERNAL ANALYSIS

Before you review the community or the audience, review the organization. Most communities die because their organizations can't support them. Specifically, you want to check if the organization has the resources, skills, and knowledge they need to develop a successful community.

2.1 Resources

There are two key resources here; people and money. In addition to these, you can also review other assets the organization is/isn't using effectively.

2.1.1 Staff
First check the size of the community team, interview each member to identify their experience in community management, ask them about their current plans of action and write up your findings.

Sometimes everything is fine, sometimes training is required. You also want to get an idea of their level of passion for the topic and the community. Look at whether they have previously participated in this topic beyond the level required by their work.

2.1.2 Budget
Now check the budget for the community. A community isn't expensive, but it's not free either. It helps to be able to have a budget to support platform development, a growing community team, and the ability to help the community in other ways (e.g. free samples, events etc…).

We usually look for around $20k - $50k in platform development costs, $60k per year in staff costs and $20k in community support costs in addition to our own fee – but this varies wildly by the organization and their ambitions.

2.1.3 Assets
In addition to the important two above, review what other assets they have and whether they're being effectively used. These assets include:

- Existing audiences (on any platform)
- Exclusives (to give to the community first)
- Existing contacts with prolific figures
- Strong brand familiarity/reputation

2.2 Knowledge

This part is a little more difficult. You have to understand if the organization as a whole *gets* and supports the community. This usually means interviewing stakeholders (if they wont be interviewed, that's a bad sign).

Specifically you want to find out if this:

- Agree and understand the business objectives.
- Agree and understand the time-frame
- Agree and understand the means of measuring the success.
- Understand what the community is (compared with other social approaches)
- Understand how to participate (e.g. not spam the community)

We often make our clients sign a physical document stating that they know and agree to the above statements.

2.3 Internal summary

Now summarize what you've just written. Skip the parts that are fine, focus on what needs to be improved. This usually involves internal meetings and/or internal training to resolve.

Don't worry about fixing these problems yet, we cover that later. Right now just highlight any concerns you have.

3.0 AUDIENCE & SECTOR ANALYSIS

Review the audience and sector to determine if the concept is in line with the needs of the audience, the position is right, or (for new communities) what you need to do to create a successful community.

This process requires observational/data analysis, surveys, and lives interviews with members of the target audience. The information collected should be included with this strategy document. We have included our template documents at the end of this strategy. Be sure to include any footnote references in this document as well.

3.1 Audience analysis

3.1.1 Demographics

Using existing data, advertising data from similar sites, traffic analysis, or reports of your target audience, identify the demographics of your audience. Pay particular note to clusters of demographics especially those that may be underserved by existing communities or feel a unique identity from other communities.

Report your kind findings here along with any relevant implications concerning their use of technology, communities, or participation in the topic.

3.1.2 Habits

Using survey data, review the habits of your audience. What does the audience do in their lives? What are their jobs, practices, most likely time of internet use, and other relevant activities.

Report your findings in this section. Again, look specifically for unique clusters of people within your audience.

3.1.3 Psychographics

Using interviews with at least 10 members of the target audience, identify the hopes, fears, aspirations, and opinions of your members on different topics. Again, try to identify clusters of people that share the same viewpoints on topical issues. Report your key findings and highlight the possibility of building content, discussions, or activities based upon this material.

3.2 Sector Analysis

3.2.1 Existing communities

Search for existing communities in this topic. Use keyword search analysis to identify a range of likely terms. Then use Google to search for the topic name followed by the words forum, fans, community, group, association, events, meetups and other terms. Also search for the topic on Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Meetup.com. Identify any other possible groups. Also identify what type of community this is (place, practice, action, interest, or circumstance).

3.2.2 Existing connections/gatherings/groups
Ask members in your interviews how they currently interact with each other. Look for existing groups and offline networks. Note those you find here

3.3 Key media and influencers

Ask the target audience where they get their information about the topic. Note the responses. Also use sites like alltop.com and your own searches {topic} + blog / {top 10 {topic} blogs to identify the most popular sites about your interest.

Review these sites to identify the key people within this sector. These will be those whom are mentioned most frequently in these sites or participate in interviews within that sector. You want to identify those that have the most power, have the largest followings, or make particularly unique contributions within that field.

3.4 Audience & Sector Analysis Summary

Now summarize your findings from your research. If this is for an existing community, compare the audience and sector analysis against the community concept. Highlight any disparities you find. If it is for a new community, then we will use this information to create the community concept.

3.5 Community Concept

This section is for new communities only. You need to answer the following questions:

What will the community be about?
This should be based upon the interest identified by the audience. This interest should be something that audiences mentioned frequently. It should be something that members spend a lot of time on (habits), spend a lot of money on, is emotionally provocative (psychographics), or is representative of the members' identity (psychographics.

Who is the community for?
This should be based upon two qualifiers i.e. This is a community for {x} whom {y}. This is based upon your audience analysis. You want to target the community's effort at a very specific cluster to get the community started. Your sentence should read:

This is a community for {demographics/habits/psychographics} that/whom {demographics/habits/psychographics}.

What type of community will this be?
You should be developing the only community of its kind. Do not compete directly with existing communities. Use your sector analysis to identify what types of

community (place, practice, action, interest, or circumstance) exist already and make your community unique.

This might mean making your community a hybrid (a community of practice/action – a community of financial professionals to change accounting practices).

What is the purpose of the community?
This is partly answered by the questions above. However, you want to identify a purpose of the community that aligns with the motivations and needs of your audience. A community of interest, for example, might be the best place to discuss the latest news about that interest, plan events within that interest, create fan fiction about that interest, share memorabilia etc…

What will happen in the community?
This is where you identify the specific types of content, discussions, and activities which will take place in the community. Your answers should specifically be in line with the activities identified above.

4.0 CURRENT SITUATION

To understand the current state of the community, you need to measure the growth, activity, sense of community, and return on investment. This involves A LOT of data collection. Don't even think about writing this until you have data to support your conclusions – include graphs and figures to highlight that you're not making this up.

4.1 Community Health

There is a difference between a community's health and its progress. First we want to review the health of the community through the prism of growth, activity, sense of community, and return on investment.

4.1.1 Growth
Review the current levels of growth in the community through the membership lifecycle. You want to identify several figures here.

1) The number of active members per month (members which have made a contribution)
2) The number of new, unique, visitors per month (and sources of these members).
3) The number of new, unique, visitors that register (open confirmation e-mail and click confirmation link).
4) The number of new, unique, visitors that make their first contribution.
5) The number of contributors still active after six months.

Identify where members are coming to the community from and where they are dropping out of the conversion process. List these stages in order of priority.

4.1.2 Activity
Review the current level of activity in the community. There are several clear metrics we need to identify here.

- The total number of posts per month
- The average posts per active member (try to remove the top and bottom 15%)
- The number of visits per active member
- Average time spent per active member
- Average number of pages per visit per active member
- Most common time members visit the site
- Total time spent on site

Not all platforms will give you all these figures, so you may need to use proxy figures (or use a better platform!).

From these figures, you should be able to see both what members are doing when they visit the community and the overall trends. If they're spending more time on the site, but participating less frequently, that indicates a problem.

The most common time will tell you when members visit the site. Highlight the trends that are a cause for concern here. List these in order of priority.

4.1.3 Sense of Community

The only way to measure this is to conduct a survey of a sample of your community members using the Sense of Community Index-2 (SCI-2). Make sure it's not just the most active members that respond, use reliable surveying techniques. When you do this survey you will notice two things:

1) The sense of community amongst members to a score between 0 – 92.

2) Which elements (membership, influence, integration of needs, shared emotional connection) are most lacking.

The latter automatically highlights what areas of the community are of most concern to your audience. Over time, you will able be able to identify the trends (what's going up and down). Summarize your findings here

4.1.4 Return on Investment

Calculating the return on investment to an exact financial figure (or a reasonable range) is possible in every community. However, it is also too complicated to explain here. If you're interested, please sign up for module 3 of FeverBee's Professional Community Management Course where we cover this in some depth.

After you have reviewed the return on investment, you should be able to determine if it's going up or down, and whether the community provides much value to the organization. This will highlight if you need to better integration the community with the organization.

Summarize your findings below the calculations.

4.1.5 Community Health Summary

You can now write a brief summary about the current health of the community. Highlight the biggest areas of concern.

4.2 Community Progress

It's one thing to identify the health of the community and highlight areas of concern that need to be improved. This alone, however, won't develop the community. We also need to ascertain the *progress* of the community.

The actions you take to develop a community that's in the *inception* stage of the lifecycle is very different from the actions you take for a community in the *maturity* phase of the lifecycle.

You measure progress through the prisms of growth, activity, and sense of community.

4.2.1 Growth Progress
You need to measure two figures here.

1) The number of new registrations invited in some manner by the community manager/organization (e.g. direct invites or messages to the mailing list). If possible, you can add a 'How did you hear about the community' to the registration form for a short period of time.

2) The number of member registrations to the platform.

This measures how many members registered and how many of those were invited directly by the community manager (or organization). If you subtract the former from the latter, you see how many *organic* visitors you had (members joining through sustainable channels).

If the number of organic visitors is twice that of those invited by the community manager, you've reached a critical mass of growth and are in the establishment phase. If more than 90% of your new members are from organic channels, you've reached maturity.

There are two caveats here. First, the community manager/organization must continue to invite the same number of people to the community. Second, ignore any surges from single channels. Surges distort the data (unless surges themselves are a pattern).

4.2.2 Activity progress
You use the same process to measure activity. First you identify the three key figures.

1) The responses to discussions initiated by the community manager.
2) The responses to discussions initiated by the community.
3) The number of responses to *organic* discussions (initiated by the community.

Review if more than 50% of discussions are organic (critical mass), 90% of discussions are organic (maturity).

4.2.3 Sense of Community

This is already measured in the health. If your SOC is between 0 and 24, you're in inception/establishment, if it's between 24 and 48, you're in maturity. If it's 48+ you're in mitosis.

4.2.4 Summary

Based upon the information above you can identify exactly where your community is in the lifecycle and what it needs to focus upon to move to the next stage of the lifecycle.

4.3 Current Situation Summary

Now briefly summarize the entire current situation for the community. Highlight any internal issues, the health issues, and the issues that are preventing the progress of the community (e.g. low levels of activity per member, low sense of community etc…).

This whole section (collecting the data) should take about a month to properly complete. The next section should take about a day or two to complete.

5.0 ONLINE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Based upon this data, we can now establish the strategy of the community. I prefer to set 3-month goals as opposed to 12-month goals. You might feel differently, but we've typically found that 12-month goals are nice in theory, but feel too distant to matter right now. However, a community manager with 3-months to hit fixed targets tends to work like crazy to hit them (especially if bonuses are involved).

The overall strategy at this stage is to resolve the internal issues and health issues, and further develop the community. The broad strategy will usually be to either resolve internal issues, improve the health of the community, increase the

development of the community, or improve the return on investment of the community.

5.1 Objectives

Summarize what you think you can achieve within the next 3 months. Be realistic, if you bite off too much here, you will demotivate yourself (or your community manager) in the future. This is really important; you need targets you can hit. Unrealistic goals help no-one. These objectives should be measurable and linked to the data we have discovered above.

Prioritize internal issues first, then health issues, and then progress issues. All objectives should be directly measurable. Some immediately goals might include:

1) **Ensure full understanding of community goals and process amongst all stakeholders.**
   The deliverable might be a signed document agreeing to the goals from all relevant stakeholders. Failing this, at least some visible support by e-mail from each relevant stakeholder.

2) **Stabilize the decline in posts per active members in the community.**
   This is directly measurable by your metrics that will show whether the decline has continued or has been reversed.

3) **Increase the sense of community between members to 24**. This is measurable by the SCI-2 index and is a clear target with fixed actions that help develop the community.

These are purely examples. When you begin this process, your objectives will gradually shift after each three-month interval, from internal, to health, to progress, to ROI (assuming your community is not already a health community in maturity).

5.2 Tactics

The way you implement a community strategy is through the community management framework. There are eight elements to this framework. We have shown these below. They cover all the internal and external processes involved in the community. You establish targets for each of these.
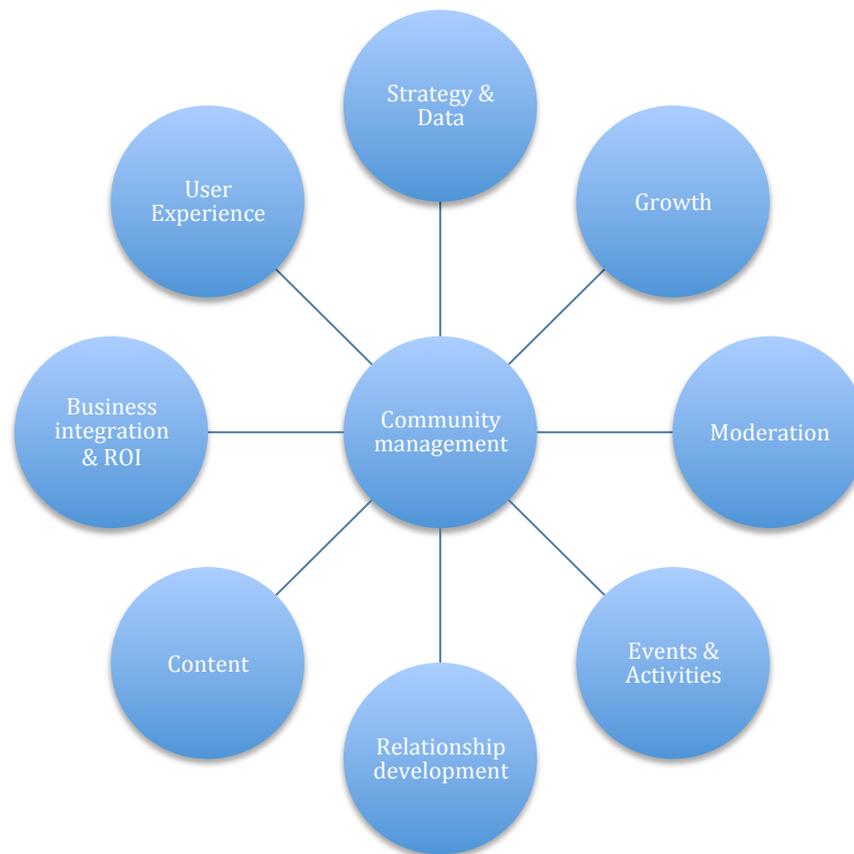
1) **Strategy**. Collect data, establish the ongoing strategy for the community, and develop an action plan for the community. This is the purpose of this document.

2) **Growth**. Increase membership of the community.

3) **Moderation**. Removing obstacles to participation and encouraging contributions.

4) **Events & activities**. Facilitating events & activities to keep members engaged.

5) **Relationship & influence**. Building relationships with key members and gaining influence within the community.

6) **Content**. Creating and editing content for the community.

7) **Business Integration**. Advocating internally within the organization and integrating business processes with community efforts.

8) **User experience**. Improving the community platform and community participation for members.

(don't include the above, it just illustrates how we put the actions together)

5.3 Growth

If your objectives are related to growth, here you identify what activities you will take to sustain the right sort of growth. Be very specific here. Detail exactly what your interventions are, who you will approach, what you will tell them, what data you have to support your conclusions.

If you're going to improve the newcomer to regular conversion ratio, then specify what interventions you will undertake. For example:

- **Create a newcomer-specific area**. To reduce the social fear of participating, we will create a specific newcomer area within the community to encourage contributions from members whom have just completed the registration process. This will be filled with common questions received from newcomers (e.g. *What equipment is best for a first-time skier, best places to book a ski trip).* We will approach five of the top regulars to help answer these questions and look after the newcomers.

5.4 Moderation

If your objectives are related to moderation (initiating discussions, increasing the number of posts, steering the community etc..) list the activities you will take here. Again, be very specific. Highlight exactly what discussions you will initiate, why those discussions (use an audience analysis for this). Also detail any necessary concentration or dissipation of activity.

5.5 Events & Activities

List here any events and activities that will take place in your community. Again be specific about what events you need. You know, for example, that events increase the sense of community amongst members. You might therefore aim to introduce more of these.

5.6 Relationships & Influence

Detail any tactics you will undertake to increase your influence in the community, recruit volunteers, or establish important relationships. Identify specifically who you intend to build relationships with (by name) and your approach to achieve it, and then plans to benefit from those relationships.

5.7 Content

List what categories of content you intend to create, explain why this sort of content, and then outline specifically what content you need. I prefer to use the headlines

here to indicate what the content will be about in the community. The content you create should be linked explicitly to the audience analysis.

5.8 User Experience

This is website specific. Use your data to identify any potential website issues that might need to be changed. This may also involve some environmental scanning (e.g. what technology is relevant?). List any changes that will be made to improve the user experience.

5.9 Business Integration

In this section highlight any actions will be undertaken internally to support the community. This might include training sessions, internal meetings to gain stakeholders support, releasing exclusive news to the community first etc…

6.0 ACTION PLAN CALENDAR

Now create a calendar that lists what activities will be undertaken every day for the next few months. Highlight a rough estimate of how much time each activity will take.

Now you can see what activities will take place, on which day and how long it will take. Does everything you listed above fit into the calendar? Do you have enough time for everything? If not, remove the lower priority tasks and put that into the next three months.

Most importantly, make sure you do the items that are on the calendar before you undertake the reactive tasks in the community.

You can use our framework here:

http://course.feverbee.com/CalendarTemplate20.xlsx

Don't forget that measurement is also going to take up a lot of your time. Allocate around two hours per week or a straight eight hours per month.

ABOUT FEVERBEE LIMITED

FeverBee Limited is the leading community consultancy, providing high quality consulting, training, events, and resources to community management teams across the globe.

Founded by Richard Millington, our vision is to change the world's approach to how communities are built. Rather than focus on specific technologies, we believe, and have proved, that the key to sustainable community success lies within the psychological and emotional connections that users have with their communities of choice.

FeverBee created the world's first community management training course in 2010, and has since trained hundreds of community management professionals on how to leverage proven social sciences to improve communities at every stage of the community lifecycle. The method, part of which you have learned in this course, is based on the study of psychology to stimulate growth and activity in an online community. For more information on our full course, please visit course.feverbee.com.

Along with our course, FeverBee is widely known as a leading authority on community best practice. Visit feverbee.com for daily thoughts on community management, and join our community, communitygeek.com, to work with the world's top community professionals on advancing the craft.