8 Kick-Ass Community Management Tips

By Ben Martin, CAE, Online Community Results

Our partner and community management expert, Ben Martin, CAE, led a high-level community management round table for our 2014 Higher Logic Learning Series with five innovative community managers. He asked the tough questions, our panel provided the real answers. And throughout the discussion, we compiled this list of kick-ass community management tips from Ben.

1 **Devote the time.** Whether you are a multi-million dollar organization with hundreds of staff members to lend hands or a small association with four people in the office—you need to devote staff time to getting things done. Align time for at least one or two community managers to stay involved with daily tasks, member welcomes and behind the scenes issues. "If you build it, they will come," only happens in the movies.

2 **Think of yourself as a gardener.** A community manager is a gardener. You can't make a plant grow; all you can do is to create the right conditions for its growth. The gardener is responsible for seeding, feeding and weeding: seeding the questions, feeding the conversation and weeding out both good and detrimental content.

3 **Follow a process.** Make a schedule and stick to it. Some tasks are daily, but you can break it down further to weeks, months, quarters, etc. A good process almost guarantees success. Key procedures I recommend: response posts within 24 hours, personal welcome messages to new members and at least one new and original post to a discussion forum every week.

4 **Express the value you bring.** When a community starts producing results, in terms of engagement and investment, a kick-ass manager can clearly explain the value to the powers that be. Every community manager needs to be prepared to answer the question "What are we getting?" Continued ROI and organizational goals can and should be addressed by a community manager.

5 **Know how to reply.** A feature I think every online community should have is the reply by email functionality. It's a huge challenge for communities up to this point. For sure it's a nut you want to crack, because replying directly from the email into a specific thread in the community is huge, not to mention very difficult to achieve technology-wise.

The Higher Logic™ **Learning Series**

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Interactive Webinars Hosted by Community Leaders

We started the Learning Series to cover new topics and create conversations that matter to people and organizations creating and building dynamic online communities. Attendees build their knowledge-base and share user stories in an exclusive environment designed to be collaborative, interactive and educational. This inventive series is a collection of social networking webinars hosted by industry experts, thought leaders and Higher Logic staff who are empowering their organizations through social technology—and big ideas.

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8 Kick-Ass Community Management Tips (cont.)

6 **Let vendors/exhibitors participate.** A lot of organizations won't consider letting them into a community. My point is that these people help drive the conversation along. Their whole purpose is to raise awareness about themselves (connecting people to others, posting answers) and they are vested in being involved and engaged. Just make sure to steer them away from self-promotion and more towards engagement.

7 **Communicate ROI** to management, the board or those who don't participate in the community. Focus on a small number of metrics to present to all of your higher-ups. Twenty or thirty unique metrics is too overwhelming to analyze. But it's important to note: numbers don't lie. Take those monthly stats, put them in a spreadsheet, and watch your trend line. Steady, consistent growth is what you want to see (no hockey sticks in the chart). Take screenshots from within your community to show how members are helping members. These actions are what you want and what you should have strategized for in the outset.

8 **Deploy Terms of Use** to help manage risk in your online community. The rules change often and that's okay, you can keep up. Check out Online Community Results' community management course—it includes a risk module taught by a lawyer. He and I agree that you need those terms of use, need to get agreements from members and need to renew the terms often.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

The Online Community Results Blog

Subscribe here and get busy reading, commenting and providing feedback of your own.

The Single Best Kick-Ass Community Management Tip:

Put your content in other vehicles. Add links to threads or blogs to create more dialogue.

Do you have a kick-ass community management tip?

Share it with us on Twitter using our handle @HigherLogic and hashtag #HLlearn.

Meet Ben Martin, CAE

Recognized as one of the "Five to Watch" by ASAE's Associations Now magazine, and a winner of the National Association of REALTORS®' Technology Spotlight Award, Ben Martin is an association executive with over a dozen years of experience in trade and individual membership organizations. He is the Chief Engagement Officer at Online Community Results, providing outsourced online community management, consulting, coaching and strategy services. Learn more about Online Community Results on Ben's website.