# 8

## Essentials for
## Effective Online
## Communities

# Overview

The purpose of this ebook is to provide you with 8 actionable requirements for achieving effective BtoB and BtoC Communities.

These requirements are based on thousands of hours of VoC research conducted by our firm for clients including IBM, MassMutual, Gilt, QVC, HP, Microsoft and Norton AntiVirus.

Per the research, please keep in mind that the following requirements are equally important for BtoB executives and BtoC decision makers.

We will be using the following VoC research-based definition of Community;

*A Community is a group of people united through a common interest to share information and exchange conversation. Communities are exceptional ways for marketers to demonstrate a brand's consumer commitment and interest. A community needs to be a place of collaboration not a place of advertising. It needs to be a platform based on value that is derived from relevance and appreciation of time spent by members.*

We hope these 8 VoC research-based strategies will help ensure the success of your Community.

# 1 Tangible Value

When it comes to value, both BtoB and BtoC consumers stated that communities must offer **tangible value** to make it worth visiting or contributing.

**BtoB** decision makers expect communities to provide information which enables them to:

✔ Stay up to date on issues which affect their jobs/roles and peers.

✔ Learn about new solutions.

✔ Collaborate and offer opinions.

✔ Grow their professional network.

**VoC Research Quotes**

*"I'm looking to see what's going on amongst my peers to see if somebody's fighting with the same technology pieces and parts that we are and if there's any solutions out there."*

*"I want a community that tells me as an IT professional where I can meet and talk to other IT professionals, look at career opportunities, and keep up to speed on new trends."*

**BtoC** value is driven by the ability to make better decisions:

✔ BtoC buyers want to learn about products from experts and aspirational influencers (i.e., Oprah) but rely on peer networks and online reviews for feedback on the practical application/usage and efficacy of the product.

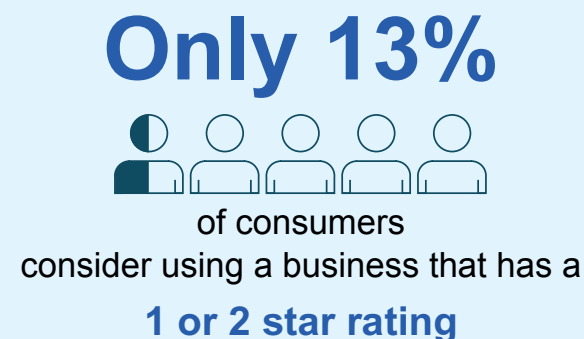✔ BtoC decision-makers stated that communities enable them to make "more informed decisions."

**VoC Research Quotes**

*"I feel like I've grown up with them and they've helped me mature my shopping habits. I feel like I'm buying higher quality and making better choices."*

*"I enjoy shopping there because I can learn about other things I might be interested in from the other shoppers. We're all Moms trying to get by. It's nice being part of a group where everyone is facing the same challenges and dealing with the same things."*

As a result, communities that revolve around reviews are especially valuable.

Industry research has identified that:

**92%**

of consumers
**read online reviews**

**40%**

of consumers
form an opinion by reading just
**1-3 reviews**

**Only 13%**

of consumers
consider using a business that has a
**1 or 2 star rating**

# ② Safe Space

For both BtoB and BtoC, it was surprising how often the following was cited; the need for community participants to feel they can express themselves because they are in a "safe and supportive environment".

**VoC Research Quotes**

Here's a representative research comment from a CIO:

> *"CIOs like me can feel embarrassed and afraid to ask or comment because we don't know as much as we think we should, given our title. People have to feel that they won't be embarrassed or ridiculed if they ask a question or share an opinion."*

Some consumers articulated it this way:

> *"Sometimes people can be harsh and cruel. I don't want to take that chance."*

Research participants stated that one of the primary ways to ensure a feeling of safety for community members was to have community managers who monitor conversations to prevent "out of line" comments.

It was stated that the "feeling" associated with a brand's community impacted overall brand perception. Therefore, it was recommended that brands designate community managers to cultivate a feeling of protection and free conversation.

Both BtoB and BtoC buyers were in agreement that additional trust and credibility was given to reviews that had associated profiles to determine the reviewer's "credentials and credibility". The assurance that the poster was knowledgeable and "trustworthy" made the review even more valuable.

**BtoB VoC Research Quotes**

*"My first thought; is it remotely possible that this person has a clue about this issue?"*

*"I need to see who is writing the review. It makes a difference as to how much weight I assign it."*

*"Need to know whether to trust the contributor. Need to see their profile. And, when I click on their profile, I expect their bio to come up, no matter how abbreviated it is."*

**BtoC VoC Research Quotes**

*"I usually look up to see how old the person is who wrote the review. People in their 40s and 50s are the most informed. Younger people don't really know much about these things."*

*"I need to see who is writing the review. It makes a difference as to how much weight I assign it. For instance, Mid-Westerners seem to like very different styles than us New Yorkers."*

For BtoB and BtoC, the quality of value provided by the community will motivate some to pay it forward by contributing input when they have something useful to share.

## CASE IN POINT

Fabric softener brand Snuggle calls every registered customer part of "Team Snuggle, and it also gives them an actionable way to pay it forward. In its "SeptemBEAR Mission," the brand encouraged consumers to participate in its online communities by posting photos and videos of their "favorite teddy bear moments" with the hashtag #ShareABear, in turn the company donated 5,000 teddy bears to children in need.

**VoC Research Quotes**

*"The greater the value I have received from reviews, the more obligated I feel to reciprocate and submit a post to help others."*

*"I don't just want to be a taker. I want to pay it forward by taking the time to contribute my reviews to the community."*

The factor that separates a successful community from an overlooked community is the ongoing commitment to interact with, and acknowledge, those who take the time to actively participate in posting. These are the people who give the blog "life" and value.

Here are some representative BtoB and BtoC insights:

**VoC Research Quotes**

"I want to feel valued. Tell me how I am doing. How many people are reading my posts and evaluations? Is it helpful to them?"

"If I am investing my time to help other customers, I would like the company to give me some recognition. And it's not just about discounts, recognition counts way more."

## CASE IN POINT

Online community powerhouse, reddit has over 200 million unique monthly visitors in over 10,000 active communities. Erik Martin, reddit's General Manager and original Community Manager, had this advice when thinking about community members;

"You're not as smart as your users collectively. Just listen more and trust that the people who are passionate about the subject matter are going to do interesting and unexpected and amazing things with control you give them…. If you have customers who really want to talk about a certain subject, want do something with your product or show off something they've done with your product, you're a fool not to embrace that."

# 6 Company Hosting the Community Cannot Blatantly Sell

Brands need to understand that communities are a place to disseminate information — not marketing materials. A community must be a safe place for participants to seek and share stories, experiences, opinions and facts. It is an avenue for brands to demonstrate their commitment to helping consumers versus trying to sell them.

This comment from the research should be the gold standard by which brands build their communities:

**VoC Research Quote**

*"A good community gives a sense that you are dealing with peers versus something that's being driven by the vendor to take you to products or marketing materials."*

Online digital marketing strategy resource Momentology conducted a study of online communities and named the SAP Community Network as one of their best in class. This is due to its ability to engage with more than 2.5 million small and medium-sized businesses executives who contribute time and expertise to grow the network and gain reputation. To fulfill their engagement goals, the company offers incentives for users to continue to engage.

Research findings were surprisingly consistent about the fact that people want to work with companies they perceive as "*doing good things*", such as providing valuable information.

**VoC Research Quotes**

*"Because of this community, [the company] is perceived to be a strategic partner not just a vendor."*

*"It gives them a leg up [on the competition] in the sense that they're not just trying to sell me; they are trying to help me learn from my peers that there are many ways to achieve our goals."*

According to Nielsen, "66% of respondents say they're willing to pay more for products and services that come from companies who are committed to positive social and environmental impact."

"Brand trust and reputation are paramount," says Carol Gstalder, senior vice president, reputation and public relations solutions, Nielsen. "An excellent reputation makes it far more likely a company will be welcomed into new communities…"

FreshBooks, a cloud-based accounting solutions provider in Toronto, wanted to show that they were a company that cared, both in and outside their online communities. The company devised the #FreshBrew campaign, in which they delivered hot coffee to entrepreneurs and small business via a tweeted daily route. Additionally, the company monitored comments in order to surprise individual offices with hand-delivered coffee. During the entire campaign, interaction was continually scrutinized, which resulted in both a very successful campaign as well as invaluable insights about their customers and the opportunity to create personal bonds between clients and the company.

Overwhelmingly, the concept of relevance came up again and again in the VoC research. If the posts are not relevant and "relate-able" to the BtoB or BtoC audience, the information loses credibility and value.

**VoC Research Quotes**

*"I need to evaluate the relevance of people's posts. Need to know the writer's title, size of their company, their reporting relationship and their industry."*

*"Must know who the CIO reports to. There are differences between a CIO who reports to the CFO, or in some cases, God forbid, HR. Their challenges are distinctly different than the CIO who reports to the CEO."*

According to online community expert Vanessa Paech, Senior Manager for Content and Community Strategy at REA Group, "Determine which content will strengthen relationships, align with the shared goals of members and signal to an outsider what the community is all about…. A good test is to ask what a newcomer can learn about the community by consuming its content…Content as a component of community strategy should always reflect community priorities…Do your homework. Ask members directly. Test and learn; never assume…. Content strategy can be a uniquely powerful binding element in an online community. Just don't forget who it's there to serve!"

# In Summary

To recap, following are the 8 requirements to help ensure that you deliver powerful community experience.

**1** **Tangible Value**

**2** **Safe Space**

**3** **Background and Credentials of Contributors**

**4** **Provide Compelling Reason to Contribute**

**5** **Contributors Want to Feel Valued**

**6** **Company Hosting the Community Cannot Blatantly Sell**

**7** **Impact on Perception of the Hosting Company**

**8** **Context is Critical**

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ERDM conducts specialized VoC research to identify CX strategies that generate significant increases in revenue.

Clients include IBM, MassMutual, Gilt, QVC, HP, Microsoft and Norton AntiVirus.

His influential blog *Ernan's Insights on Marketing Best Practices* appears in Forbes, Huffington Post, CMO.com, CustomerThink and Business 2 Community.

Named by the Online Marketing Institute as one of the *2014 Top 40 Digital Luminaries* and by Crain's B to B Magazine as one of the *100 most influential people in Business Marketing.*

Ernan's latest book is titled, *Voice of the Customer Marketing*. His other books include *Opt-in Marketing* and *Integrated Direct Marketing*.

ERDM conducts <u>specialized Voice of Customer (VoC) Relationship</u> Research to identify Customer Experience strategies and actions. These strategies generate significant increases in revenue for clients including IBM, Mass Mutual, Gilt, Hewlett-Packard, QVC and Norton AntiVirus.

Inducted into the DMA Marketing Hall of Fame due to results clients achieve with ERDM's VoC Relationship Research driven strategies.
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