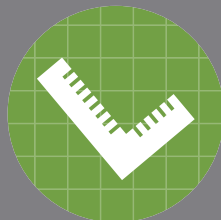# HIGHER LOGIC
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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
BLUEPRINT

AN ACTIONABLE TOOL TO BUILD, LAUNCH AND GROW A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY

*+ Best practice insights from community experts*

Name/Organization:

Introduction

The dictionary definition of a "community" includes the quality of distinctiveness—a quality important to consider when building any kind of community. Although it can certainly take on many shapes and forms, an online community is one where people are invited to come together to learn, educate, mentor and discover more about themselves and their peers. Community members will not be satisfied with just any experience, but a distinctive and original experience that allows everyone to better function, create and innovate. The fundamentals of building an online community are inherently the same—create a solid foundation for which to bring people together under a common interest.

Launching a community is a building process—you need good tools, and you need to learn the best ways to use them. Just like making anything for the first time, building your community can feel overwhelming or uncertain, especially in the early stages of development. We've got you covered.

Higher Logic created the Community Engagement Blueprint to help you jump-start your community and set actionable goals. Although we consider it a "beginner's guide" to developing a clear community engagement strategy and vision, we hope you use this Blueprint as your official community toolkit. We filled it with advice, worksheets and best practice insights from community experts. It's also easy to review, download and share with your team. Fill it out on the go, or print it out and have a group working session.
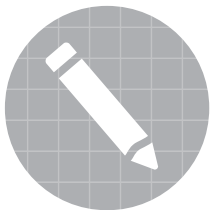
PHASE 1: SKETCH
- Set your community goals
- Brainstorm ideas
- Define your audience
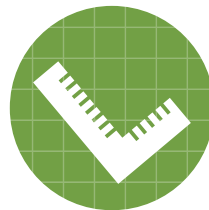
PHASE 3: FRAME
- Organize, strategize, repeat
- Establish key metrics

PHASE 2: CRAFT
- Listen, then listen some more
- Ask the right questions
- Create rich-media content

PHASE 4: BUILD
- Delegate, outsource or DIY
- Automate to work smarter

PHASE 1: SKETCH

What's the objective?

Set your community goals

It's important to make sure that your community strategy aligns with your organization's overall goals. Make sure this new initiative supports the "big picture" objectives. What opportunities are you pursuing with launching the community? How do they fit into your organization's existing strategy and goals?

Outline 3-5 clear and tangible goals for your community to fit into the existing strategy your organization has set.

Establish thought leadership.

Expand brand awareness.

Drive engagement.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Check out the side bar content for examples!

Best practice insights from community experts:

"Understand the purpose of your community, and focus your energy and efforts. Find out what your community was created to do, establish goals to get there and don't worry about everything else."

Teah Hopper,
Director of Digital Engagement
Missouri Realtors

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"Believe in the community you support and work toward providing value, but also fun. It's important to showcase your dedication to the community by engaging your members in a way that encourages discussions and provides a platform for open exchange and knowledge sharing."

Andy Steggles
President &
Chief Customer Officer
Higher Logic

PHASE 1: SKETCH

Where do we start?

Brainstorm ideas

Let the brainstorming begin! Describe what you want your community to represent. How would you define it? Spend some time with your team thinking about a community name that best suits your organization's brand and audience. Have fun with it—the name will also be reflected in your site URL.

What analogy comes to mind?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What can we call it? List name options:

Toastmasters - "Meeting Room"   _____

HubSpot - "Inbound"   _____

Int'l Franchise Assoc. -"FranSocial"   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Best practice insights from community experts:

"A community is a group of people sitting around a campfire, and the community manager is the one that stirs the fire and adds more wood when the fire gets low."

Teah Hopper
Director of Digital Engagement
Missouri Realtors

....

"Building a community is like tending a garden; it requires constant care and a love for the practice."

Lindsay Starke
Online Community Coordinator
Professional Photographers of America

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PHASE 1: SKETCH

Who are we talking to?

Define your audience

Gather the team to outline your specific audience. Try to come up with a clear picture of who you should target. From here you can try creating specific personas.

What is the audience's objectives and goals?:

1. Ask questions and find answers quickly.

2. To do their job better.

Pain points:

No trusted resource to get industry/product best practices.

Jobs to be done:

1. Provide value to their organization.

2. Meet annual/quarterly goals.

Best practice insights from community experts:

"A community is a highly engaged group of people who come together around common interests. They interact and support each other, and help meet their members' common needs of belonging, recognition and safety."

Sarah Robinson
CEO & Chief Strategist
Fierce Loyalty, Inc.

"The biggest thing you can do is to understand interpersonal psychology. Everyone should speak organically and use natural language, like a human being and not a PR robot. Become everyone's friend, rather than a seller."

Lindsay Starke
Online Community Coordinator
Professional Photographers
of America

PHASE 2: CRAFT

How can we create value?

Listen, then listen some more

The best stories and the most productive conversations will come from your audience. They know what they want, but you can leverage channels and industry experts to reach out, find them and engage.

Where does our audience sit online? List LinkedIn groups, popular blogs, etc.:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Our social media presence and channels (Twitter, etc.):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Industry experts we can leverage (list names of prominent industry experts and thought leaders):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Best practice insights from community experts:

"You have to listen, and also remember the medium is not the message—it's just the vehicle."

Ash Mathew
Franchise Communication Associate
Domino's

....

"Ask your members a ton of questions, then hush up and listen. Then listen some more."

Sarah Robinson
CEO & Chief Strategist
Fierce Loyalty, Inc.

....

"Remember about LinkedIn... if used the right way, it can be leveraged as a billboard to send prospects and potential event registrants over to your site."

Andy Steggles
President &
Chief Customer Officer
Higher Logic

PHASE 2: CRAFT

How do we engage?

Ask the right questions

Your community members will have plenty of questions, so it's important to anticipate what they will ask. Be prepared to have meaningful conversations before they happen. Develop 5-10 "seed" questions and answers.

Seed questions:

1. I'm looking for a resource to complete my project on _____. Ideas? Help! ?

2. Topic _____ has been in the news lately, how have people handled it? ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

_____ ?

Best practice insights from community experts:

DO:

✓ Personalize the question, and add a story/reason for asking the question

✓ Provide context

✓ Post the seed questions at the right time

✓ Ensure you have a pool of "champions" who you can reach out to

DON'T:

✗ Make the questions sterile

✗ Ask your members to post the questions

✗ Use your more provocative questions all at once

> Heather McNair
> Director of Client Success
> Higher Logic

PHASE 2: CRAFT

How can we stand out?

Create rich-media content

Consider building an online library of collateral to engage and promote your community. Rich-media content is addictive—it's the stuff your audience craves and will find useful. Think of the topics you could match with the content types below, and start developing a distribution strategy around each type.

Infographics:

_____

Videos:

_____

Interviews:

_____

Articles:

_____

eBooks:

_____

Case studies:

_____

Webinars:

_____

Best practice insights from community experts:

"Create addictive content! Infographics are addictive because there is a demand for data that is quickly transferable, coherent and visually interesting. Not sure where to start? Be inspired by examples; we posted a few favorites on a Pinterest board called Cool Infographics."

Lauren Wolfe
Creative Director
Higher Logic

PHASE 3: FRAME

Do we have a plan?

Organize, strategize, repeat

Create a strategic plan for your community just like any of your products or services. This helps you keep track of your ideas and plan how to better engage with your audience. Jump-start your Community Engagement Strategy by reviewing your existing marketing/content plan and customize accordingly. Below are a few must-haves.

List all current communication channels (e.g. blogs, website, Twitter, email marketing):

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Perform a content inventory & audit—list existing content assets & general themes:

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Best practice insights from community experts:

"Your community is a knowledge repository full of conversations, shared resources and ideas. Map out a content game plan every month or every quarter. Think about what's going on in your organization and how the theme of the month or quarter will correlate."

Andy Steggles
President &
Chief Customer Officer
Higher Logic

Plan out your content like an editorial calendar in a magazine, with a focus on themes:

Annual theme:

Quarterly theme:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Monthly theme:

1. _____   7. _____
2. _____   8. _____
3. _____   9. _____
4. _____   10. _____
5. _____   11. _____
6. _____   12. _____

PHASE 3: FRAME

How do we keep track?

Establish key metrics

Managing a successful community involves tracking your performance and continually adjusting your engagement strategy. This exercise will help you start thinking about measuring your success, and understanding which metrics are crucial in tracking performance. What outcomes do you want? Think about the types of reports you will focus on.

Determine which metrics are important for your organization and try projecting community performance against several key factors.

Community members: _____

Content contributors: _____

Profiles created: _____

New discussions/threads started: _____

Content shares and comments: _____

Messages sent: _____

Community invitations sent and accepted: _____

Web traffic: _____

Total logins and unique logins: _____

Top 3 SEO keywords and rankings: _____

Set realistic engagement goals for the first year:

Monthly: _____

Quarterly: _____

Annual: _____

Best practice insights from community experts:

"I track new threads, new messages, files shared, blogs posted, unique authors, and unique logins. The first four items measure the amount of content being created by the community and serve to show the amount of value the community brings to our members through collaborative content sharing. "

Lindsay Starke
Online Community Coordinator
Professional Photographers of America

....

"There are a million ways to measure the success of a community and a lot to learn as a new community manager. You can quickly become overwhelmed and not know where to start. The work will never end. There are always improvements to be made and new technologies to employ."

Teah Hopper
Director of Digital Engagement
Missouri Realtors

PHASE 4: BUILD

Do we have what it takes?

Delegate, outsource or DIY

Would you be able to manage all aspects of your community effectively? It's important to think about your organization's valuable time. Consider the areas your team excels at and list community management services you may need to outsource.

Strategy: _____

Community management: _____

Content: _____

Curation and planning: _____

Brand representation: _____

Social feedback and management: _____

Idea generation: _____

Crowd sourcing: _____

Listening and responding: _____

Analytics and reporting: _____

Moderation and motivation: _____

Best practice insights from community experts:

Be a delegation and networking ninja! Partner with community management professionals. Hire external resources as an extension of your team to make sure your community is set for success."

Heather McNair
Director of Client Success
Higher Logic

PHASE 4: BUILD

Do we have the right tools?

Automate and work smarter

What collaboration tools do you have at your disposal? Use them effectively to build successful and engaged communities. Take a look at these essential functions and list the tools you have at your disposal to get the job done.

Manage discussion groups: _____

Monitor community interaction: _____

Coordinate content development and distribution: _____

Create and maintain resource libraries: _____

Maintain community directories: _____

Promote events and maintain a calendar: _____

Email communication: _____

Run reports and analytics: _____

Mobile enablement: _____

Best practice insights from community experts:

"Invest in a time management tool or set of tools. Everyone's system will be a little different, but having a way of managing the flux of information and staying responsive to users is crucial. Taking the time to learn and test which tools help save you that time, aggregate messages and help you track who you need to get back to can save you a few headaches, but can also ultimately help you be the best community manager you can."

Megan Keane
Membership Director
NTEN

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Summary & Next Steps

Although there are no right or wrong answers to any of the blueprint exercises, it might take a few tries to "get it right" for your organization and community. Don't be afraid to go back and forth in your effort to create a consistent community engagement strategy that makes sense for your team. Once you nail it down, this blueprint will provide a more structured approach for the whole team in launching your community and tracking your progress.

We hope that exploring this blueprint will help you master your community engagement plan, have a clear vision during your creative brainstorm sessions, and take charge of successful delivery and execution—all fundamental elements to the long-term relevance of any organization.

Are you ready for what's next?

Higher Logic can help

We get it. Building dynamic, engaged and happy communities is what we do, and we're here to help. There are a lot of moving parts but you can get organized. We can walk you through the phases and help build an initial community engagement strategy for your company or organization. Visit www.higherlogic.com or call us at 866.670.1402 to learn more.

SEE A HIGHER LOGIC DEMO

RESOURCES:

CMX - the hub for the community building movement
http://cmxhub.com

Online Community Results - helps organizations grow their private online communities
www.onlinecommunityresults.com

The Community Roundtable - the network of the smartest community leaders
www.communityroundtable.com

FeverBee - the online guide to growing thriving communities
www.feverbee.com

HIGHER LOGIC

Higher Logic provides an industry-leading, cloud-based community platform, with over 25 million engaged members in more than 200,000 communities. Organizations worldwide use Higher Logic to bring like-minded people together in secure communities, designed to ignite knowledge sharing, drive content creation, solve problems and improve performance.