


White Paper

NEXT GENERATION ONLINE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT IS HERE



Increase Member
Engagement, Lower Toxicity,
Boost ROI and Drive
Ad Revenue



There's little doubt that the more enterprises and organizations can connect closely with their constituents, the better. This need for engagement has spawned thousands of online communities as a lynchpin of many brands and organizations' efforts to build loyalty and trust.¹

For more than 15 years, online communities have brought people with a shared purpose together, both for their benefit and that of the company or organization. From the beginning, the objective has been to connect with the community participants more deeply — on a more authentic, human level. This is achieved through an ongoing dialogue, sharing relevant content and providing a safe space to engage and product/service support. All of this is accomplished by an engaging next generation (NextGen) online community management (OCM).

Over the early years, meeting the basic needs of members characterized the first generation of community management (CM). Today, the world of the online community has changed dramatically. In the beginning, people were simply happy being members of a community. Today, they expect more than just fellowship. They voice opinions, seeking answers and relevance in every conversation.

In the past, community content that managers thought might be interesting was posted with less regard for relevance, urgency and context. Today, it's different. Now it's "Don't just share information you developed or found, provide us with original, *expert* insights we can use."

And, of course, there's discourse. Controlling toxic conversations and content in today's communities requires greater finesse, agility and knowledge of local nuances.

¹ Computers in Human Behaviour, Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M., & Sankaranarayanan, 28(5), 1755–1767. 2012 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016>

What do Online Community Members Want Today?

A Deeper, More Meaningful Connection

Much has changed, to the point where what we're now working with could be characterized as online community *relationship* management, or CoRM.^{2,3} Framed this way, the objective is to zero in on as many individual community member relationships as possible to tailor conversations and content to address their needs.

Clearly, the time has come for many managers of mature communities to begin executing an advanced strategy to meet the demands of their continually evolving and maturing communities. It's happening already. In 2021, 37% of all communities reported having an advanced strategy — one that is approved, operational and measurable.⁴

Meanwhile, in less mature community programs, it's a different story; community management resources are only 19% of their total community budget. This includes approving budget for community team hires to close leadership, programming and metrics gaps.⁴

When it comes to engagement, there's more room for improvement. More than 48% of community professionals have identified difficulty in consistently engaging members as one of the biggest frustrations with running their communities.⁹



2 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/dbm.2011.3> Online brand community engagement: Scale development and validation Brian J. Baldus a, Clay Voorhees b, Roger Calantone Journal of Business Research Page 7 2014 <https://asset-pdf.scinapse.io/prod/2055336412/2055336412.pdf>

3 Cottica, A., Melancon, G., & Renoust, B. (2017). Online community management as social network design: Testing for the signature of management activities in online communities. Applied Network Science, 2(1), 2–30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41109-017-0049-9>

4 The State of Community Management Report 2020 <https://communityroundtable.com/what-we-do/research/the-state-of-community-management/the-state-of-community-management-2020/the-state-of-community-management-2020-roundtables/>

9 <https://cmxhub.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CMX-CommunityIndustryTrendsReport-2020.pdf>





3 Steps to Building a Thriving NextGen Community

The strategic importance of community management for every company in the community management space has matured to the point where they need to begin considering next-generation community management to stay relevant and cater to ever-evolving consumer needs.

The next generation is an end-to-end, fully integrated solution configured to serve the needs and reflect the personalities of a wide range of online communities around the world: from gamers to doctors, parents to engineers, streaming media viewers to restaurant franchisees or virtually any group.

It's built on a foundation of versatility, expert insights, contextual content, trust and safety. And it's made to pay for itself: the next generation accommodates the need for companies to defray the costs of community management by providing a compelling, context-rich medium platform for advertisers.



Power Engagement with Expert Insights

A community management (CM) provider needs access to subject matter experts (SMEs) who intimately understand the needs and personalities of a specific community. When a question or issue is raised by an individual or group, members need answers and insights they can trust. Savvy SMEs have their fingers on the pulse of their communities to be able to create and encourage valuable, relevant content.⁵ Highly contextual content keeps members active, engaged and coming back for more.

⁵ What are the factors that contribute to a healthy online community? Niels Schillewaert, Steven Debaere, Tom De Ruyck 2015 Page 6 <https://www.quirks.com/articles/what-are-the-factors-that-contribute-to-a-healthy-online-community>



Online communities are a popular way of learning new topics — 94% of members are looking to their communities to learn about new topics.⁸ They're relying on expert community SMEs to deliver that knowledge.

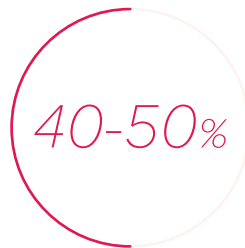
An end-to-end next generation CM solution needs geographic versatility, too. A global delivery model with SMEs who understand the cultural nuances and context of the geography they cover is the most effective solution to ensure effective content creation. That means having local experts who speak the languages and even dialects of individual communities. These dedicated SMEs are better able to inherently understand nuances and idioms specific to their regions' cultures. Naturally, this fosters a closer bond and affinity between the enterprise/organization and its community.

Recently, we helped a leading digital publisher realize their next generation results. SMEs contributed insights based on in-depth research and analysis to ignite compelling and response-provoking conversations. This attracted thought leaders and industry experts to enrich conversations, build engagement, amplify community experience and create a safe space for the members.

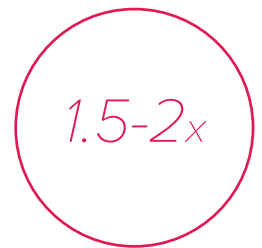
And the results speak for themselves:



higher
engagement



more community
likes



increase in the number
of comments



2

Weed Out Toxicity Before it Grows

Trust and safety plays a larger role too; specifically, managing toxic behavior and content. As communities grow, so does the opportunity for bad actors to spoil the party, all of which is a good reason why 14% of users mistrust content generated and shared on community sites.⁶

More concerning is that 45% of social media users were frustrated with the problem of bullying and offensive language pervading many social media platforms, and online communities are no exception.⁷

This urgent need to boost member confidence — and, in turn, reduce churn — is why an updated content moderation (CoMo) capability is a key element in the next generation. Over the years, the most effective CoMo has combined experienced human moderators working in concert with content moderation driven by artificial intelligence (AI).

Community member-generated content diversity, contextual nuances and complexity are growing exponentially. This added burden makes it increasingly difficult to train and configure AI fast enough to keep pace with content cascading across multiple media platforms in a community.

AI-powered moderation in conjunction with natural language programming (NLP) can be highly effective when moderation decisions are clear cut, such as identifying and flagging profanity, some pornography, common hate speech, certain abusive phrases, etc.



⁶ <https://peerboard.com/resources/online-community-statistics>

⁷ Top 42 Online Community Statistics & Trends 2021 <https://sellcourseonline.com/online-community-statistics>





Our content moderation of this client's community resulted in 60% higher productivity (versus the competition), a 350 basis point improvement in accuracy, and more than 50 million content moderation tasks in 2021.

While we wait for AI to close this comprehension gap, which could be a while, human moderators will be in the driver's seat. Trained professionals, working in concert with community managers, can study user-generated content at a deeper level. They account for content intent, context, nuance, idiom, cultural norms and all the other subtle nuances that make communication in a community of humans, well, human.

For sure, community moderation played a big role in the next gen community at one of our clients, the largest online marketplace. Their objective was to enhance moderation of content submitted by customers, sellers and manufacturers. Based on an in-depth review and analysis, we created a content moderation center of excellence with a unique human-centric approach focused on the well-being of community content moderators. Also, the in-depth analysis of the user-generated content provided the client with feedback loop to drive innovation and enabled the client to enhance their product features and launch new product.



3

Transform Costs into Profits with Contextual Ads

When upgrading a community, there's no avoiding a key factor: **money**. The good news is that now a revenue stream can be built-in: **advertising**.

Specifically, **contextual advertising**.

In a context-rich next generation online community, brands can insert their advertising at the right time in the right place as highly relevant content. This directs advertising to the target customer at the precise point and time of need.¹⁰ It's an advertisement-targeting bullseye.

When ads are contextually relevant, members warm up; 82% of community site visitors said they welcome brands that choose to participate in their communities. There's no enthusiasm gap here: people *want* to interact within the brand community, and four of five are ready to immediately become a part of them.⁶

Contextual advertising gets results: 27% of customers said using online communities played a part in their buying decision when evaluating a product or service.⁷ In fact, one of our clients' next generation community posted 20% higher ad revenues as a result of increasing member engagement.



6 <https://peerboard.com/resources/online-community-statistics>

7 Top 42 Online Community Statistics & Trends 2021 <https://sellcoursesonline.com/online-community-statistics>

10 David Kenny, John F. Marshall Contextual Marketing: The Real Business of the Internet Harvard Business Review 2000 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/12146017_Contextual_marketing_The_real_business_of_the_Internet





Next Steps for NextGen Community Management

The next generation, like so much of community management, is a human endeavor — specifically, acquiring, training and deploying a highly expert corps of SMEs who can maintain and drive engagement in the community.

Next is ensuring that your community's content moderation is upgraded with native language speaking moderators working in concert with CoMo AI and NLP to ensure a safe and enjoyable environment.

The third is to create an attractive environment for advertisers who want to conduct precisely targeted contextual advertising campaigns your community will welcome.

At Sutherland, we've deployed advanced next generation community management for several of our clients. You can take advantage of our experience — and theirs — by getting in touch.



ROI? The Numbers are Staggering

7.07%¹¹

That's no typo. Organizations moving to advanced communities are already reaping the rewards.

¹¹ <https://communityroundtable.com/what-we-do/research/the-state-of-community-management/the-state-of-community-management-2020/>

**Want to learn more? Let's talk.
We'd love to hear from you.**

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Sutherland is an experience-led digital transformation company. Our mission is to deliver exceptionally designed and engineered experiences for customers and employees. For over 35 years, we have cared for our client's customers, delivering measurable results and accelerating growth. Our proprietary, AI-based products and platforms are built using robust IP and automation. We are a team of global professionals, operationally effective, culturally meshed, and committed to our clients and to one another. We call it One Sutherland.

